

Preventing Falls

Some things you can do to prevent falls by John Robertson May 2007

Prevention is better than cure, and there are many simple precautions you can take to prevent a fall; physically, at home and when out and about. A few are listed here.

What Can You Do To Prevent Falls?

- Have your eyesight tested every year.
- If your eye doctor recommends you wear glasses, wear them.
- Have your hearing tested every two years.
- Talk to your doctor about side effects from medication you may be taking.
- See your doctor straight away if you have dizzy or drowsy spells.
- If your doctor or physical therapist recommends you use a cane or walker, use it.
- Wear clothes that will not come loose and cause a trip.
- When getting out of bed sit on the edge for a couple of minutes before standing up. This allows blood pressure to adjust; if you move too quickly you may get dizzy and lose balance.
- Exercise regularly to maintain balance, strength and flexibility.
- Learn and practice T'ai Chi Ch'uan – an ancient Chinese exercise proven to be the most effective way of delaying the onset of falling.

Preventing Falls At Home

- Make sure there is good lighting in every room; use nightlights in bathrooms, bedrooms and hallways.
- Install brighter lights.
- Always switch on lights, even in familiar rooms.
- Have flashlights handy in case of power outages.
- Move electrical and phone cords so they are not exposed.
- Keep everywhere free from clutter; pick up papers, shoes, books, clothes etc...
- Make sure things are within reach so you don't need to use stools or step ladders.

- If you do have to use a step stool, make sure someone else is home and use one with a handle that can be used on the top step.
- Ensure handrails are firmly attached and run the full length of stairs.
- Always hold handrails when using stairs.
- Add reflective strips to steps, stairs or other trip hazards.
- Secure loose rugs with carpet tape or buy rugs with a non-slip backing.
- Repair loose carpets and floorboards immediately.
- Avoid wearing slippers that may cause you to trip.
- Install handrails in the shower, bath and toilet.
- Use non-skid mats in the bath and shower.
- Use a shower bench.
- Use a raised toilet seat.
- Roll up hoses and pick up tools in the garage and yard.

Preventing Falls When Out And About

- Always hold handrails when using stairs, escalators or moving walkways.
- Wear shoes with firm non-slip soles that are easy to walk in.
- Ask for assistance if you think you may need it.

Getting Help

- If you live alone, or are afraid no-one will find you if you fall; ask a friend or neighbour to check on you every day.
- Keep phones in low easy to reach places, with emergency numbers next to the phone, or:
- Have a cordless phone, or a cell phone you can carry with you at all times, and ensure it is always fully charged, or:
- Consider an emergency monitoring service with 24 hour response.

Turn to page 21 for help on what to do if you do fall.

Keeping your balance and preventing a fall just got easier, thanks to Preventing Falls, from the experts at Harvard Medical School. Preventing Falls. Keeping your balance and preventing a fall just got easier, thanks to Preventing Falls, from the experts at Harvard Medical School. This information-packed guide explains how your body works to keep you balanced, and the health problems, medications, and home-hazards that can set you up for a fall. It's never too early or too late to take steps to protect your bones from osteoporosis fracture risk. Preventing Spinal Fractures. Broken bones of the spine are common in people with osteoporosis and often go unnoticed until more serious problems occur. Learn how to recognize the signs and symptoms of spine fractures and take steps to prevent these fractures from happening in the first place in our publication Protecting Your Fragile Spine. Preventing Falls. Each year about one-third of all people over age 65 will fall. Prevent Falls and Fractures. A simple thing can change your life—like tripping on a rug or slipping on a wet floor. If you fall, you could break a bone, like thousands of older men and women do each year. For older people, a break can be the start of more serious problems, such as a trip to the hospital, injury, or even disability. If you or an older person you know has fallen, you're not alone. More than one in three people age 65 years or older falls each year. The risk of falling—and fall-related problems—rises with age.