

## How to Prevent Falls

The Community Living Section is always looking for information to share with our older adults and senior centers. Today, in recognition of Falls Prevention Awareness Day on September 23, 2019, here are some facts and tips regarding falls.

Injuries and complications from falls affect older adults more than any other age group. In fact, falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries among older adults. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that more than a quarter of adults age 65 and older fall each year, and falling once doubles their chances of falling again. Every 11 seconds, an older adult is seen in an emergency department for a fall-related injury<sup>1</sup> and every 19 minutes in the United States, an older adult dies from a fall<sup>2</sup>. One in every five falls among older adults results in a serious injury, and older people are less able to recover from the trauma physically and emotionally<sup>3</sup>.

Many factors common among older people can increase the risk of falling: medical and orthopedic problems and the medications taken to treat them; physical changes that impair balance, gait and muscle strength; sensory declines in vision, hearing, and awareness of body position; and pain that distorts body movements.

Don't let this scare you, though. There are steps you can take to prevent your risk of falling, and many falls are preventable.

First, increase your balance, strength, and flexibility with an exercise program. Tai Chi is an excellent, low-impact way to improve balance. Practice standing on one foot when you brush your teeth.

Second, talk to your primary care provider to receive a risk assessment of your likelihood of falling.

Third, talk to your doctor or pharmacist on a regular basis about your medications. Your provider can determine medication interactions and evaluate your medications for their ability to cause dizziness or drowsiness.

# CLS Newsletter

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Fourth, make sure you have your vision and hearing checked at least once a year. Don't delay recommended cataract surgery - blurry vision can cause serious stumbles. Older people often do better with single-focus lenses, which may mean two different pairs of glasses instead of one pair of progressive or bifocal lenses. Consider hearing aids if needed to reduce being startled into a fall.

Fifth, keep your home safe by removing tripping hazards, securing loose rugs, and increasing light. Eliminate throw rugs, loose carpets, and raised ledges between rooms. Use a nonskid mat in the shower. Keep cords off the floor, and wipe up all spills immediately.

Sixth, make an honest assessment of your footwear. Throw away or give away any footwear that may cause you to catch a foot. Never walk around in socks or stockings - wear slippers with non-slip grips. Outside, use footwear appropriate for weather and surface conditions.

Seventh, always look where you're going, and avoid trying to multitask while walking. Put cellphones away, and use a walking stick, cane, or walker if stability is uncertain.

Last, but not least, talk to your family members and caregivers about helping with all of the above steps.

Sources:

<sup>1</sup> National Council on Aging

<sup>2,3</sup> New York Times—Falls Can Kill You. Here's How to Minimize the Risk. Feb 25, 2019

# HOW TO PREVENT FALLS

The following tips can help reduce injury-inducing falls among older adults.

by Heather Welch

## 1 EXERCISE FOR BETTER BALANCE

Increase your balance, strength, and flexibility with exercise. Tai Chi is an excellent, low-impact way to improve balance. Practice standing on one foot when you brush your teeth.

## 2 LIKELIHOOD OF FALLING

Talk to your primary care provider - they can give you a risk assessment to determine your likelihood of falling.

## 3 MEDICATION REVIEW

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist regularly about all the medications you are taking. Your provider can determine medication interactions and evaluate your medications for their ability to cause dizziness or drowsiness.

## 4 GET A VISION AND HEARING TEST

Have your vision and hearing tested at least once a year. Don't delay recommended cataract surgery - blurry vision can cause serious stumbles. Older people often do better with single-focus lenses, which may mean two pairs of glasses instead of one pair of progressive or bifocal lenses. Consider hearing aids if needed to reduce the risk of being startled into a fall.

## 5 KEEP YOUR HOME SAFE

Remove tripping hazards, secure loose rugs, and increase light. Eliminate throw rugs, loose carpets, and raised ledges between rooms. Use a nonskid mat in the shower. Keep cords off the floor, and wipe up all spills immediately.

## 6 CHECK YOUR FOOTWEAR

Throw away or give away any footwear that may cause you to catch a foot. Never walk around in socks or stockings - wear slippers with non-slip grips. Outside, use footwear appropriate for weather and surface conditions.

## 7 LOOK WHERE YOU'RE GOING

Always look where you're going, and avoid trying to multitask while walking. Put cell phones away, and use a walking stick, cane, or walker if stability is uncertain.

## 8 TALK TO YOUR CAREGIVERS

Talk to your family members and caregivers about helping with the steps above.