
Prevention of Falls and Fractures -- Safety Tips

At any age, people can change their environments to reduce their risk of falling and breaking a bone. Use these safety tips to prevent falls.

Outdoor Safety Tips

- In nasty weather, use a walker or cane for added stability.
- Wear shoes with rubber soles for added traction.
- Look carefully at floor surfaces in public buildings. Many floors are made of highly polished marble or tile that can be very slippery. If floors have plastic or carpet runners in place, stay on them whenever possible.
- Identify community services that can provide assistance, such as a 24-hour pharmacy or grocery store that takes orders over the phone and delivers. It is especially important to use these services in bad weather.
- Use a shoulder bag, fanny pack or backpack to leave hands free.
- Stop at curbs and check their height before stepping up or down. Be cautious at curbs that have been cut away to allow access for bikes or wheelchairs. The incline up or down may lead to a fall.

Indoor Safety Tips

- Keep all rooms free from clutter, especially the floors.
- Keep floor surfaces smooth but not slippery. When entering rooms, be aware of differences in floor levels and threshold.
- Wear supportive, low-heeled shoes, even at home. Avoid walking around in socks, stockings or floppy, backless slippers.
- Check that all carpets and area rugs have skid-proof backing or are tacked to the floor, including carpeting on stairs.
- Keep electrical cords and telephone lines out of walkways.
- Be sure that all stairwells are adequately lit and that stairs have handrails on both sides. Consider placing fluorescent tape on the edges of the top and bottom steps.
- For optimal safety, install grab bars on bathroom walls beside tubs, showers and toilets. If you are unstable on your feet, consider using a plastic chair with a back and nonskid leg tips in the shower.
- Use a rubber bath mat in the shower or tub.
- Keep a flashlight with fresh batteries beside your bed.
- Add ceiling fixtures to rooms lit by lamps only, or install lamps that can be turned on by a switch near the entry point into the room. Another option is to install voice – or sound – activated lamps. Use bright bulbs in your home.

- If you must use a step-stool for hard-to-reach areas, use a sturdy one with a handrail and wide steps. A better option is to reorganize work and storage areas to minimize the need for stooping or excessive reaching.
- Consider purchasing a portable phone that you can take with you from room to room. It provides security, because not only can you answer the phone without rushing, but you can also call for help should an accident occur.
- Don't let prescriptions run low. Always keep at least one week's worth of medications on hand at home.
- Check prescriptions with your doctor and pharmacist to see if they may be increasing your risk of falling. Make sure all your physicians are aware of all the medications you are taking to make sure there are no interactions between these medications.
- Arrange with a family member or friend for daily contact. Try to have at least one person who knows where you are.
- If you live alone, you may wish to contract with a monitoring company that will respond to your call 24 hours a day.
- Watch yourself in a mirror. Does your body lean or sway back and forth or side to side? People with decreased ability to balance often have a high degree of body sway and are more likely to fall.

Practice Balance Exercises Every Day

- While holding the back of a chair, sink or countertop, practice standing on one leg at a time for a minute. Gradually increase the time.
- Try balancing with your eyes closed.
- Try balancing without holding on.
- While holding the back of a chair, sink or countertop, practice standing on your toes, then rock back to balance on your heels. Hold each position for a count of 10.
- While holding the back of chair, sink or countertop with both hands, circle to the left with hips, repeat to the right. Do not move your shoulders or feet. Repeat five times.

Taken from National Institute of Health, "Preventing Falls and Related Fractures"