



A Guide to Preventing Falls and Keeping Safe

The content in this Guide is courtesy of the National Council on Aging. As we move into the winter, the risk of slips and falls increases significantly. We care about preventing training site accidents and keeping everyone safe and healthy there and at home. Therefore, we encourage our participants and host agencies to read and share this valuable information. Let's do all we can to ensure everyone's health and safety!

Sincerely,

Associates for Training & Development

Debunking the Myths of Older Adult Falls

https://www.ncoa.org/wp-content/uploads/Myths-of-Older-Adult-Falls_2017.pdf

Many people think falls are a normal part of aging. The truth is, they're not.

Most falls can be prevented—and you have the power to reduce your risk.

Exercising, managing your medications, having your vision checked, and making your living environment safer are all steps you can take to prevent a fall.

Every year on the first day of fall, we celebrate National Falls Prevention Awareness Day to bring attention to this growing public health issue. To promote greater awareness and understanding here are 10 common myths—and the reality—about older adult falls:

Myth 1: Falling happens to other people, not to me.

Reality: Many people think, “It won’t happen to me.” But the truth is that 1 in 4 older adults fall every year in the U.S.

Myth 2: Falling is something normal that happens as you get older.

Reality: Falling is not a normal part of aging. Strength and balance exercises, managing your medications, having your vision checked and making your living environment safer are all steps you can take to prevent a fall.

Myth 3: If I limit my activity, I won’t fall.

Reality: Some people believe that the best way to prevent falls is to stay at home and limit activity. Not true. Performing physical activities will actually help you stay independent, as your strength and range of motion benefit from remaining active. Social activities are also good for your overall health.

Myth 4: As long as I stay at home, I can avoid falling.

Reality: Over half of all falls take place at home. Inspect your home for fall risks. Fix simple but serious hazards such as clutter, throw rugs, and poor lighting. Make simple home modifications, such as adding grab bars in the bathroom, a second handrail on stairs, and non-slip paint on outdoor steps.

Myth 5: Muscle strength and flexibility can't be regained.

Reality: While we do lose muscle as we age, exercise can partially restore strength and flexibility. It's never too late to start an exercise program. Even if you've been a "couch potato" your whole life, becoming active now will benefit you in many ways—including protection from falls.

Myth 6: Taking medication doesn't increase my risk of falling.

Reality: Taking any medication may increase your risk of falling. Medications affect people in many different ways and can sometimes make you dizzy or sleepy. Be careful when starting a new medication. Talk to your health care provider about potential side effects or interactions of your medications.

Myth 7: I don't need to get my vision checked every year.

Reality: Vision is another key risk factor for falls. Aging is associated with some forms of vision loss that increase risk of falling and injury. People with vision problems are more than twice as likely to fall as those without visual impairment. Have your eyes checked at least once a year and update your eyeglasses. For those with low vision there are programs and assistive devices that can help. Ask your optometrist for a referral.

Myth 8: Using a walker or cane will make me more dependent.

Reality: Walking aids are very important in helping many older adults maintain or improve their mobility. However, make sure you use these devices safely. Have a physical therapist fit the walker or cane to you and instruct you in its safe use.

Myth 9: I don't need to talk to family members or my health care provider if I'm concerned about my risk of falling. I don't want to alarm them, and I want to keep my independence.

Reality: Fall prevention is a team effort. Bring it up with your doctor, family, and anyone else who is in a position to help. They want to help you maintain your mobility and reduce your risk of falling.

Myth 10: I don't need to talk to my parent, spouse, or other older adult if I'm concerned about their risk of falling. It will hurt their feelings, and it's none of my business.

Reality: Let them know about your concerns and offer support to help them maintain the highest degree of independence possible. There are many things you can do, including removing hazards in the home, finding a fall prevention program in the community, or setting up a vision exam.

Learn more about falls prevention at www.ncoa.org/FallsPrevention.

NCOA Blog Healthy Living

18 Steps to Fall-Proof Your Home

By Scott A. Trudeau | 10.27.2016, 18 Steps to Fall Proofing Your Home

<https://www.ncoa.org/blog/falls-prevention-home-18-step-safety-checklist/>

More than 75% of falls take place inside or in close proximity to the home, but your home doesn't have to be an obstacle course of potential falls. Some simple and quick changes will easily help reduce your risk of falling. Review the steps below to get started today.

The front door

- **Check your front steps.** If you have steps at the entrance of your home, make sure they are not broken or uneven. Try to fix damage, such as cracks or wobbly steps, as soon as possible.
- **Check the lighting around your front door.** Make sure all entryways are well lit so you can see where you are stepping. It's best if you can have motion sensor lights, so you don't have to worry about turning lights on yourself. Plus, they can save you money on energy costs.
- **Consider installing a grab bar.** Putting grab bars on one side of your door can provide balance while you're putting the key in the door, or stepping up once you have the door open, especially if you are carrying bags or the steps are slick.

Kitchen

- **Move your most commonly used items within reach.** Put the kitchen items you use every day—like plates, glasses, or even seasonings—on the lowest shelves. This will help you avoid using stepstools and chairs—things you can easily lose your balance on—to reach items on higher shelves. Plan a head for special needs. Ask a loved one or visitor for help every few months or so to rotate seasonal items to within reach – for example baking dishes that are only used at holiday time.
- **Replace scatter rugs with rubber backed rugs.** Scatter rugs or area rugs are tripping hazards. If you prefer to have a mat on the floor near the sink or stove, make sure it is placed securely on the floor and doesn't have turned corners or edges that you could trip on. The best rugs have heavy-backed rubber bottoms so they stay in place.
- **Clean up spills immediately.** Kitchen floors can be slippery and very dangerous when wet! Keep a hand towel **within** easy reach to help you clean up spills easily and quickly.

Stairs

- **Keep steps clutter-free.** Give yourself a clear path up and down by making sure things like shoes and books are put away and not left sitting on steps.
- **Add strips of contrasting color to help visualize your stairs better.** Adding colored tape to the edges of each step will help differentiate monochromatic steps. Pick a color of tape that will stand out against the color of the stairs. Make sure to put the tape on the top and over the edge of each step.
- **Try to have lighting at the top and bottom of the stairs.** Overhead lights at the top and bottom are ideal. A light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs keeps you prepared no matter which direction you're going.
- **Add a second handrail.** Most staircases only have one rail, but handrails on both sides will help keep you balanced. It's important to make sure they are both installed securely so that they will support you.

Hallway

- **Check your lighting, but don't change the bulbs yourself.** Good lighting is key in all areas of the home, but don't get a chair or stepladder to change out-of-reach high bulbs. Ask your family members, friends, or neighbors when needed and consider LED bulbs to help reduce the number of times you have to address this issue. They last longer and can save you money in the long run.

Bedroom

- **Make sure the light near the bed is easy to reach.** If you have to get up in the night, you know you're just a click away from better visibility.
- **Keep the path from your bed to the bathroom clear.** Make sure it is well lit and clutter free. Place nightlights along the route, so you can see where you're walking. Some night-lights have sensors and go on by themselves after dark or in response to motion.
- **Consider installing a bed rail.** There are railings that fit easily between your mattress and box spring and can provide support when you are getting in and out of bed. The bed rail is also good for times when you go from lying/sitting/standing, and the change of position makes you dizzy. Having something to hold onto will keep you steady while your body adjusts.
- **Move the phone within arm's reach of your bed.** You might need help in the middle of the night, so having a phone nearby is a safe option.

Bathroom

- **Add a non-slip rubber mat to the shower or tub.** The traction of the mat or rubber self-stick strips will help keep you from slipping when stepping on the wet surfaces.

- **Install grab bars by the toilet and tub.** The hard surfaces of the bathroom can make falling even more dangerous. Having properly installed grab bars around the toilet and tub provide needed support and balance. Remember, towel racks aren't grab bars, but grab bars can be towel racks. Grab bars should be installed by a professional to make sure they are at the correct levels and properly anchored to the walls. The National Association of Home Builders has Certified Aging-in-Place Specialists who work in many communities. If you cannot find a certified professional, then check with your local Area Agency on Aging for a list of handymen who can help with installation.
- **Consider a shower chair and a hand-held shower head.** These can help you avoid reaching or straining during your shower.

Find an occupational therapist for advice

Occupational therapists help you continue doing the things you want and need to do every day. Occupational therapists ask, "What matters to you?" not "What's the matter with you?" When it comes to falls, they can assess your home environment to identify hazards and suggest ways to improve the fit between your home and your activities to keep you safer.

When purchasing equipment for your home, like grab bars, ramps, etc., it's important to keep in mind that not every toilet, doorway, etc. is made equal. It's not always as simple as going to your local hardware store or pharmacy and asking a clerk for assistance—sometimes you need an expert, and that's where an occupational therapist can help.

Conclusion

When assessing your home, remember to look for these three things:

1. Good lighting
2. Clutter
3. Easy access to the things you use the most

Also, keep in mind that you always want three points of contact no matter what you are doing. If you are walking up steps or maneuvering in and out of your shower, for example, you want to have two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand in contact with something sturdy.

If you do not own your home, talk with your landlord about making these changes. They will often work with you to get accommodations in place. Don't assume just because you are renting that you can't make the necessary changes you need to stay falls free.

We all have the tendency to put things off, especially when we are thinking about preventing a problem that hasn't happened yet. This can be a problem, so I challenge you to make at least one change right now that will help prevent a fall in your home.

Take Control of Your Health: - 6 Steps to Prevent a Fall

<https://www.ncoa.org/wp-content/uploads/NCOA-Falls-Free-Infographic-680pixels-0917.pdf>

Every 11 seconds, an older adult is seen in an emergency department for a fall-related injury.

Many falls are preventable.

Stay safe with these tips!

1 Find a good balance and exercise program

Look to build balance, strength, and flexibility. Contact your local Area Agency on Aging for referrals. Find a program you like and take a friend.

2 Talk to your health care provider

Ask for an assessment of your risk of falling. Share your history of recent falls.

3 Regularly review your medications with your doctor or pharmacist

Make sure side effects aren't increasing your risk of falling. Take medications only as prescribed.

4 Get your vision and hearing checked annually and update your eyeglasses

Your eyes and ears are key to keeping you on your feet.

5 Keep your home safe

Remove tripping hazards, increase lighting, make stairs safe, and install grab bars in key areas.

6 Talk to your family members

Enlist their support in taking simple steps to stay safe. Falls are not just a seniors' issue.

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Winterize to Prevent Falls

<https://www.ncoa.org/wp-content/uploads/Winterize-to-Prevent-Falls2.pdf>

Below are five simple steps that YOU can take today to reduce falls among older adults and adults with disabilities in your community.

1

Raise awareness

- Post and share the simple infographic—6 Steps to Prevent a Fall — from the National Council on Aging.

2

“Winterize” shoes, boots, and assistive devices

- Attach spikeless ice and snow shoe gripper sole covers to shoes for extra stability when walking on slippery surfaces. Look for these at sporting goods stores.
- Attach an ice gripper cane tip that has spikes on the bottom to penetrate the ice and secure a firm grip. Ice grip tips can be purchased online.
- Choose winter shoes with rubber soles to maintain traction on slippery surfaces.
- Try this inexpensive way to make wheelchair snow tires.
<https://unitedspinal.org/wheelchair-snow-tires/>

3

Carry kitty litter for slick surfaces

- Encourage older adults to carry a zip top bag filled with a lightweight kitty litter in their pocket and cast it out ahead of themselves on slick surfaces.

4

Screen older adults for fall risk

- Health care providers: begin to check ALL older adults with the STEADI fall risk screening tool as part of your normal intake and reevaluation process. Learn more about administering the STEADI screen and using evidence-based falls prevention programs in your community.

5**Give the gift of falls prevention**

- Encourage adult children to give fall-proofing gifts to their parents
- Fall alarm systems that are motion triggered without hitting a button
- Higher toilets in the home
- Replace multifocal glasses with single vision eyeglass lenses
- Grab bars in bathroom and next to outside steps or inside thresholds
- Install firm stair railings on both sides of stairways and set automatic lights over stairways and by outside entrances
- Shorter days mean more time in the dark—give tiny flashlights to attach to keys, hats, and coat buttons

Help make this season a safe, warm, and wonderful one for your patients, family, and community!

Source: Mindy Oxman Renfro, PT, PhD, DPT; Chair, American Physical Therapy Association's AGPT Balance & Falls SIG; Lead, Montana's Falls Free Coalition; University of Montana Rural Institute/MonTECH programs.