

Falls Prevention for Older Adults

Debunking the Myths of Older Adult Falls

10 Myths About Older Adults and Falls



KEY TAKEAWAYS

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. 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 more than 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.

Take Control of Your Health:

6 Steps to Prevent a Fall

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

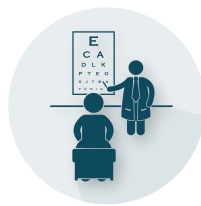
Ask for an assessment of your risk of falling. Share your history of recent falls.



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

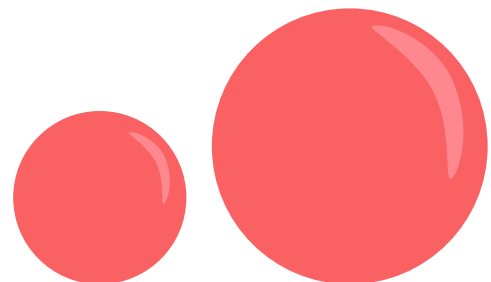
Enlist their support in taking simple steps to stay safe. Falls are not just a seniors' issue.

To learn more, visit ncoa.org/FallsPrevention.

Let's Get Moving: 5 Tips to Find a Balance and Exercise Program

As we age, it is common to feel unsteady or start to have a fear of falling. The good news is, there are many programs available that are proven to improve balance and strength to help decrease the risk of falls. Here are five easy ways to stay strong and find a program in your area.

- 1. Do exercises regularly.** If you were referred to a physical therapist to prevent falls, do your exercises as recommended by the physical therapist.
- 2. Contact your area agency on aging.** Visit eldercare.acl.gov or call 1-800-677-1116 to find the nearest area agency on aging (AAA) in your community. The AAA may offer information on its website, or you can give them a call to find out what balance and exercise programs are available nearby.
- 3. Visit your local senior center.** Senior centers offer a variety of programs and activities for people to join. They are often a "one-stop-shop" for programs that support healthy aging, including programs that support falls prevention.
- 4. Bring a friend.** Trying something new can be intimidating. Once you find a program that looks promising, take a friend or caregiver with you! You will have more fun, and you'll be able to motivate each other.
- 5. Don't forget online options.** Many physical activity programs are now available online. You may be able to participate in balance or exercise programs without leaving the comfort of home.



Talking To Your Doctor About Falls: 6 Tips for Helpful Conversations

More than one in four older adults falls each year, but only half tell their doctor. It is important for your doctor to know about any health problems, including concerns about balance and falls. Get the most out of your conversations with these six tips.

- 1. Write a list of things you want to talk about.** Before your appointment, create a list of health topics you want to talk about, including balance and falls. The outline will help you remember your conversation points and questions.
- 2. Ask for a falls risk assessment.** If you have fallen, have trouble walking, or feel unsteady, talk to your doctor about having a falls risk assessment.
- 3. Talk about other specialists.** Ask your doctor if you would benefit from seeing a physical therapist, occupational therapist, or other specialists to help improve balance, strength, medication use, nutrition, vision, and hearing to reduce your risk of falls.
- 4. Be honest about your concerns.** Tell your doctor if you have fallen and share as many details as possible. The more your doctor knows, the more they can help you.
- 5. Take notes—and ask for notes!** Bring a notepad and pen to write down any important information your doctor shares with you. This helps to remind you of information shared during the appointment.
- 6. Ask your doctor questions.** If there is anything you do not understand, ask your doctor again. Repeating information back to the doctor will help you remember and let the doctor know you understand the information.



Review Medications with Your Doctor or Pharmacist: 5 Tips for Success

Many people take more than one prescription and use over-the-counter medications. As we grow older and our bodies change, taking multiple medications increases the chance of side effects and risk of falling. It is important to review your medications often with your doctor and pharmacist to make sure your medications are not increasing your risk of falls and other problems.

- 1. Take prescriptions only as prescribed.** Follow medication instructions such as when to take, how often, how much, and with or without food. Do NOT skip doses, take multiple doses, or take any medications that were not prescribed to you.
- 2. Keep a list of your medications.** Keep an up-to-date list of all your medications, including prescriptions (those taken by mouth, applied to the skin, eye drops, and injectables), over-the-counter medications, herbal supplements, and vitamins and minerals.
- 3. Set reminders for a medication review.** Bring your medication list to your doctor or local pharmacist, have them reviewed, and ask questions about your medicines. Make sure to get your medications reviewed at least once a year, if a new medication is added, or if your health changes.
- 4. Report side effects.** Some medications can cause side effects that make you dizzy or woozy, sleepy during the day, confused, need to urinate more often, and can even affect coordination in your legs. Talk with your doctor if you are experiencing these problems.
- 5. Stick to one pharmacy.** Using one pharmacy will keep you safer as the pharmacist tracks all the medicines you are taking. They can contact your doctor if they identify any medicines that do not work well together, that may be similar to another medication you are taking, or too high a dose.

My Medication Record

Name: _____ Tel #: _____

Age: _____ Address: _____

Primary Doctor: _____ Primary Doctor's Phone Number: _____

Specialist: _____ Specialist's Phone Number: _____

Pharmacy Name: _____ Pharmacy's Phone Number: _____

Diagnoses and Conditions: _____

Recent History/Problems: _____

Drug Allergies: _____

Name of Medication	Purpose or Reason Taken	Dose	Time(s) of day	Special Instructions or Side effects to be aware of

5 Ways Taking Care of Your Vision and Hearing Help Lower Falls Risk

Being able to see and hear well is important for good balance. Poor vision and hearing loss can increase the risk of falls. Here are five easy actions you can take today to make sure your eyes and ears are helping you reduce your risk of falling.

- 1. Get an eye exam every year.** Remember to have a dilated eye exam once a year to update your glasses and to detect eye diseases, like cataracts and glaucoma. Early detection and treatment can help protect vision and prevent vision loss and falls.
- 2. Wear glasses properly.** Use prescribed glasses and avoid wearing sunglasses inside.
- 3. Be safe while wearing bifocals:** Bifocals can make your vision blurry when navigating steps, curbs, or edges, especially while outside. If you wear bifocals, tuck your chin in when stepping over curbs and on stairs to look through the distance portion of your glasses, which provides a clearer view. Or wear single vision glasses while outside and on stairs while inside.
- 4. Check for hearing changes.** Get a hearing test once a year and receive treatment if any hearing loss is identified. Hearing tests are available online, and hearing aids for mild to moderate hearing loss are sold over-the-counter in retail stores and pharmacies.
- 5. Light it up!** Add a nightlight in the bedroom, bathroom, and hallway to help you navigate in the dark and find the light switch.

Avoid Falls at Home: 5 Easy Ways to Make Your Home Safer

Thousands of older adults fall at home each year due to common household hazards. Make sure your home is safe and help prevent falls by following a few easy tips. And an occupational therapist or physical therapist can conduct a home assessment and make recommendations on ways to help you live safely while doing the things you love to do at home every day.

- 1. Clear the way.** Remove tripping hazards, like throw rugs, cords, or clutter on the floor. Move furniture to create a path for safe movement.
- 2. Light it up.** Replace lightbulbs with bright, non-glare bulbs to help you see around the house.
- 3. Have a seat.** Place a chair in your bedroom so you can sit while getting dressed or putting shoes on.
- 4. Secure some support.** Buy a shower seat, grab bar, and an adjustable-height handheld showerhead to make bathing easier.
- 5. Store for success.** Keep frequently used items between waist and shoulder height, making them easier to access without the need for a stepstool or unsafe reaching.

Home Safety Checklist

Floors

- ☐ Keep objects off the floor such as shoes, books, papers, and clothes
- ☐ Remove rugs or use double-sided tape or a non-slip backing so rugs won't slip
- ☐ Coil or tape extension cords and wires next to the wall and out of the way
- ☐ Keep pathways clear of furniture
- ☐ Put no-slip strips on tile and wooden floors



Bedroom

- ☐ Place lamps close to the bed where they are easy to reach and use bright light bulbs
- ☐ Plug in night lights; battery-operated lights are available for areas without electrical outlets
- ☐ Keep a flashlight by your bed in case the power goes out
- ☐ Install a phone on the floor in case of an emergency

Bathroom

- ☐ Put a non-slip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub or shower
- ☐ Consider a shower chair
- ☐ Use non-skid mats
- ☐ Install grab bars next to toilets and inside showers/tubs

Kitchen

- ☐ Keep often-used items in easy-to-reach places (about waist level)
- ☐ NEVER use a chair as a step stool
- ☐ If you must use a step stool, get one with a bar to hold on to

Stairs

- ☐ Fix loose or uneven steps
- ☐ Ensure carpet is firmly attached to every step, or remove carpet and attach non-slip rubber treads to steps
- ☐ Install handrails on both sides of stairs
- ☐ Have bright lighting and light switches at the top and bottom of the stairs

Falls are not an inevitable part of aging and the risk of falling can be reduced! Find evidence-based workshops that can help reduce the fear and risk of falling near you at <https://www.ilpathwaystohealth.org/>

For more information call the IL Pathways to Health Team at AgeOptions at (708)853-5433 or email info@ilpathwaystohealth.org

Let's Talk About Falls: 5 Easy Ways to Talk to Your Family and Friends About Preventing Falls

Family and friends can play an important role in keeping you falls free. They support you for all events in your life and can also help you be independent and safe from falls.

- 1. Start off small.** Have a one-on-one conversation with a trusted friend or family member about your concerns about falls. They might have ideas and solutions.
- 2. Ask for help and be specific.** The more information you share, the more your family can help you. Ask them to help you find information that would be most helpful to you.
- 3. Involve the family.** Share with your family any upcoming medical appointments, what medications you are taking, and any current problems or concerns you have. Remember to let them know if you have already fallen and what the happened after you fell.
- 4. Keep talking.** One conversation is often not enough. Keep revisiting the topic with your family and friends and let them know if your needs change or grow.
- 5. Be assertive!** Be clear and confident as to what you need. Ask your family members to help you with actions you are taking to prevent falls, such as removing home hazards and making home modifications, like adding grab bars in the bathroom.