

FALL PREVENTION: TIPS FOR REDUCING FALLS FOR ADULTS

Healthy Living

It is important to take care of your overall health by exercising regularly and having a healthy diet to reduce your chances of falling.

Exercise:

- Exercise is one of the best ways to reduce your chance of falling; it improves balance, helps keep your joints, tendons, and ligaments flexible, improves muscle tone, increases strength. Be sure to consult with your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.
- Loss of bone mass due to osteoporosis may be minimized by performing mild weight bearing activities, such as walking or climbing stairs.
- Exercises like yoga and Tai Chi are great ways to improve coordination and balance.

Nutrition:

- Sustaining good overall nutrition is important to maintain strength and energy.
- Protein is needed (along with regular exercise) to keep your muscles strong.
- Vitamin D in your diet benefits bones and helps maintain strength and function of the lower body.
- Iron is an important part of your diet. Even without anemia, iron deficiencies can sometimes cause dizziness which increases your chances of falling.

Review Medications

- Medication side effects may cause dizziness, drowsiness, & other problems that can cause falls.
- Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about side effects and interactions of all your medicines, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins *and* herbal supplements

Home Safety

Use this checklist for your home to help decrease the chance of you or someone you love falling:

All Living Spaces:

- Remove oversized furniture and objects to clear pathways.
- Have at least one phone extension in each level of the home and post emergency numbers at each phone.
- Make sure cords and wires are secured out of the way. Coil or tape all cords and wires next to the walls to reduce the chance of tripping.
- Check lighting for adequate illumination and glare control.
- Use contrast in paint, furniture and carpet colors to denote changes in surface types or levels.
- Install electronic emergency response system if needed.
- Select furniture with armrests for support in getting up and down.
- Wear sturdy, rubber-soled, low-heeled shoes. Wearing only socks or shoes with smooth soles on stairs or waxed floors can be unsafe.
- Use mobility aids such as canes, walkers, and wheelchairs.

Floors:

- Make sure there are clear pathways in all rooms. Furniture may need to be moved so there is a clear path.
- Remove any throw rugs or use double-sided tape or a non-slip backing so the rugs won't slip.
- Always keep objects off the floor. Look for books, clothes, shoes, blankets, papers, or other objects that are on the floor and have them picked up to remove clutter.
- Make sure thresholds are flush to the floor.

Stairs and Steps:

- Remove clutter from the stairs. Pick up books, clothes, shoes, blankets, papers, or other objects that are on the stairways or pathways of your home.
- Have loose or uneven steps fixed.
- Make sure the stairway has adequate lighting.
- Make sure there is a light switch at both the top and bottom of the stairs. You can have an electrician put another one in, if needed.
- Fix loose handrails or have new ones put in. Handrails should be on both sides of the stairs and should extend the total length of the stairs.
- If the stairs are carpeted make sure the carpet is firmly attached to every step. Otherwise the carpet can be removed and non-slip rubber treads can be attached.
- Paint a contrasting color on the top of all steps to make them easier to see.

Bedrooms:

- Place a lamp within easy reach from the bed.
- Make sure your pathway from the bed to the bathroom is well lit. A night-light that goes on by itself after dark could be used.
- Keep your telephone near the bed.
- Adjust the height of the bed so that it is easy to get in and out of.
- Have a firm chair with armrests to sit and dress in.

Bathrooms:

- Place non-slip mats or self-stick strips in the bathtub and on the shower floors.
- Have grab bars installed inside and outside the tub / shower and next to the toilet.
- If needed, add a bath or shower seat.
- If needed, install a raised toilet seat.

Kitchen:

- Keep items you use often on lower shelves (counter level). You should not need a step stool to reach them.
- Do not use a chair as a step stool. If you must reach something up high, use a step stool that has a bar you can hold on to.
- Wipe up spills immediately, sweep often.
- To reduce slick surfaces, avoid using floor polish or wax.

Porch, Yard, Outside:

- Install lights following paths or overhead lights. Sensor lights ("motion lights") mounted on the house or garage are helpful because they turn on and off automatically and provide sufficient lighting.
- Flat, even surfaces help reduce chances of falling. Repair any sidewalks and paths so they are flat.
- Keep walk areas clear of clutter, rocks, weeds, and tools. Trim shrubbery along pathways.
- Repair cracks and abrupt edges of sidewalks and driveways.
- Fix loose handrails or have new ones put in. Handrails should be on both sides of the stairs and should extend the total length of the stairs.

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