

Fall prevention: 6 tips to prevent falls at work and home

Acknowledgments: The Mayo Clinic

Falls put you at risk of serious injury. Prevent falls with these simple fall-prevention measures, from reviewing your medications to hazard-proofing your home.

Fall prevention may not seem like a lively topic, but it's important. As you get older, physical changes and health conditions — and sometimes the medications used to treat those conditions — make falls more likely. In fact, falls are a leading cause of injury among older adults. Still, fear of falling doesn't need to rule your life. Instead, consider six simple fall-prevention strategies.

1. Make an appointment with your doctor -Begin your fall-prevention plan by making an appointment with your doctor. Be prepared to answer questions such as:

What medications are you taking? Make a list of your prescription and over-the-counter medications and supplements, or bring them with you to the appointment. Your doctor can review your medications for side effects and interactions that may increase your risk of falling. To help with fall prevention, your doctor may consider weaning you off certain medications — such as sedatives and some types of antidepressants. Have you fallen before? Write down the details, including when, where and how you fell. Be prepared to discuss instances when you almost fell but were caught by someone or managed to grab hold of something just in time. Details such as these may help your doctor identify specific fall-prevention strategies. Could your health conditions cause a fall? Certain eye and ear disorders may increase your risk of falls. Be prepared to discuss your health conditions and how comfortable you are when you walk — for example, do you feel any dizziness, joint pain, numbness or shortness of breath when you walk? Your doctor may evaluate your muscle strength, balance and walking style (gait) as well.

2. Keep moving

Physical activity can go a long way toward fall prevention. With your doctor's OK, consider activities such as walking, water workouts or tai chi — a gentle exercise that involves slow and graceful dance-like movements. Such activities reduce the risk of falls by improving strength, balance, coordination and flexibility. If you avoid physical activity because you're afraid it will make a fall more likely, tell your doctor. He or she may recommend carefully monitored exercise programs or refer you to a physical therapist. The physical therapist can create a custom exercise program aimed at improving your balance, flexibility, muscle strength and gait.

3. Wear sensible shoes

Consider changing your footwear as part of your fall-prevention plan. High heels, floppy slippers and shoes with slick soles can make you slip, stumble and fall. So can walking in your stocking feet. Instead:

- Have your feet measured each time you buy shoes, since foot size can change.
- Buy properly fitting, sturdy shoes with nonskid soles.
- Avoid shoes with extra-thick soles.
- Choose lace-up shoes instead of slip-ons, and keep the laces tied. If you have trouble tying laces, select footwear with fabric fasteners.
- If you're a woman who can't find wide enough shoes, try men's shoes.

4. Remove home hazards

Take a look around your home. Your living room, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, hallways and stairways may be filled with hazards. To make your home safer:

- Remove boxes, newspapers, electrical cords and phone cords from walkways.
- Move coffee tables, magazine racks and plant stands from high-traffic areas.
- Secure loose rugs with double-faced tape, tacks or a slip-resistant backing — or remove loose rugs from your home.
- Repair loose, wooden floorboards and carpeting right away.
- Store clothing, dishes, food and other necessities within easy reach.
- Immediately clean spilled liquids, grease or food.
- Use nonskid floor wax.
- Use nonslip mats in your bathtub or shower.

5. Light up your space

Keep your workspace brightly lit to avoid tripping on objects that are hard to see. Also:

- Place night lights in your bedroom, bathroom and hallways.
- Place a lamp within reach of your bed for middle-of-the-night needs.
- Make clear paths to light switches that aren't near room entrances. Consider trading traditional switches for glow-in-the-dark or illuminated switches.
- Turn on the lights before going up or down stairs.
- Store flashlights in easy-to-find places in case of power outages.

6. Use assistive devices

Your doctor might recommend using a cane or walker to keep you steady. Other assistive devices can help, too. For example:

- Hand rails for both sides of stairways
- Nonslip treads for bare-wood steps
- A raised toilet seat or one with armrests
- Grab bars for the shower or tub
- A sturdy plastic seat for the shower or tub — plus a hand-held shower nozzle for bathing while sitting down