

Safety tips to prevent falls

Falls can cause serious injuries and as we age, the risk of falling increases. If you have already fallen, you have a higher risk of having a future fall. I would recommend that you follow the next recommendations to prevent new falls:

Check with your family doctor / internist to rule out medical conditions that may explain the falls and to assure that the medications you may be taking do not affect your balance and increase the risk of falls.

Check your vision and update glass prescriptions. Do not walk with reading glasses.

When entering a room, make sure the lighting is appropriate and look for thresholds, obstructing objects and uneven floor surfaces. All the rooms where you live should have adequate lighting.

Keep all floor surfaces smooth, free from tripping hazards such as cords, wires and unexpected objects. Be disciplined in the storage of shoes and other articles, making sure they do not obstruct the usual pathways and arrange furniture to allow easy ambulation.

Wear supportive, low heel shoes. Do not walk in slippery socks. Avoid slippery and wet floor surfaces. The carpets should be tacked to the floor without protruding edges. Rugs should have anti-skid backing and the edges should not fold. It may be even safer to remove the rugs. Stairs should be well lit and with adequate rails. Hold onto rails when going up and down the stairs, particularly if you are carrying things that obstruct your view, i.e. laundry.

Install grab bars in the shower, bathtubs and toilets. Place an anti-skid rubber bathmat in the shower and tub. Wet surfaces are particularly slippery.

If your balance is poor, take shorter steps and use a cane for ambulation outdoors with a proper rubber tip. Four pronged canes provide even more support. Indoors you can lean on furniture for extra balance. When you wake-up, sit on the edge of the bed and make sure you are not dizzy before you stand.

Outdoors: avoid ice, sleet and snow. If you use public transportation, make sure you hold onto the grab bars. Do not walk while the vehicle is in motion. Do not hesitate to request a seat if necessary. Take your time getting in and out.

Make sure you can reach a telephone to call for help if you fall. Consider carrying a portable phone, or getting a personal emergency response system (PERS), especially for older patients who live alone. A PERS can prevent lengthy “lie-time” in the event of a fall and may increase feelings of security and confidence.

If despite all these measures you still feel insecure, ask for assistance from a relative or friend. If you live alone you may consider moving to an assisted-living facility.

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