

Prevent a fall, protect your health



This booklet has been adapted for Australian audiences. The original booklet was developed by Hamilton Health Science Patient Education.

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Falls are a major health issue in the Australian community. Around 30% of adults over the age of 65 experience at least one fall per year.¹

Are you at risk for a fall? A fall could cause you to have a minor injury and/or live with constant pain. A fall could even result in the need for you to live in a nursing home or cause you to lose your life.

While you are in the hospital, your health care provider will check off and review your risks of falling:

- dizziness
- medications
- low blood pressure
- inner ear problems
- changes in posture
- poor eating habits
- bladder or bowel problems
- not keeping active
- alcohol intake
- foot problems
- eyesight or hearing
- getting enough sleep
- changes in memory or trouble concentrating
- shortness of breath
- home safety

Your risk for falling may change over time. Please review this list with your family doctor.

This handout will help you learn about what increases your risk of falls and how to prevent a fall.

Do you feel dizzy?

Feeling dizzy can increase your risk of falling.

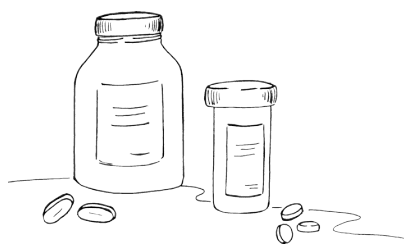
1. You may be dizzy from the side effects from certain medications.

What you can do ...

Talk to your family doctor about medications that make you dizzy or drowsy.

Important things to note about medications:

- Never use anyone else's medication.
- Keep an updated list of your medications in your wallet or purse and on the fridge.
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before taking any over the counter medications, herbal remedies, or alcohol with your prescription medications.
- Review your medications with your doctor at least every
- 6 months and whenever a medication is added or stopped.
- Ask your pharmacist about medication side effects and possible drug interactions before taking any medication.
- Use the same pharmacy all the time.
- Take outdated or unused medications to the pharmacy for disposal. Do not throw medications out in the toilet or garbage.
- Taking 3 or more medications increases the risk of side effects such as dizziness.



2. Other causes of dizziness include:

- low or high blood pressure
- inner ear problems
- standing up quickly from a chair or from lying down
- poor eating habits

What you can do ...

- Have your blood pressure checked regularly.



- See your family doctor to help find out what is causing you to be dizzy.
- When you get out of bed, sit on the side of the bed for a few minutes before you stand up. After standing, pause and take one slow deep breath before you take a step.
- Have something to eat at least every 4 hours during the day. Follow Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. Available at:
<https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines/australian-guide-healthy-eating>

Are you keeping active?

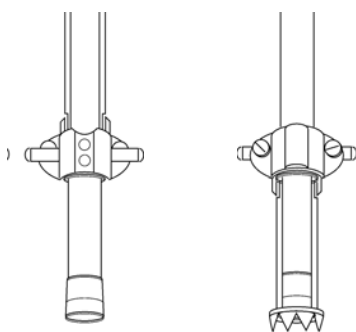
Keeping active will:

- make it easier for you to move
- help you keep your balance
- help improve stiff joints and muscles



What can you do ...

- Talk with your doctor about safe physical activity that is right for you. Plan regular activity and gradually increase it.
- Join your community or senior's recreation centre. Look for programs such as Tai Chi to help improve your balance.
- Talk to your doctor, nurse, occupational therapist or physiotherapist about any discomfort or pain.
- If you use a cane, make sure it has a rubber tip. In the winter, use a cane with a sharp tip to prevent slipping.



Rubber tip Sharp tip

Types of Canes

Do you drink alcohol?

Drinking alcohol can increase your risk of falling. People drink alcohol for a number of reasons including:

- to help them sleep
- to relieve aches and pains
- when lonely, sad, grieving, depressed, bored or in other stressful situations
- however, alcohol intake can make these matters worse

What you can do...

- Talk to your doctor. Your alcohol intake may be increasing your risk of falling. Also ask about alcohol/drinking support groups in the community.
- Record how much alcohol you drink and how your body responds to this amount.
- Talk to your doctor about other ways to help you sleep, manage stress or depression and how your medications may react with alcohol.

Do you have problems with your feet?

Having problems with your feet can increase your risk for falling.

What you can do ...

- Wear shoes with rubber soles and flat heels. It is important to wear shoes that will not fall off your feet, even indoors. Do not walk around in stocking feet.
- Make sure your footwear is in good repair.
- If your shoes are loose and you can't afford a new pair, buy insoles or wear extra socks.
- Buy slippers that fit properly and have closed heels.
- Wear loose socks or stockings. Knee highs can cut off your circulation in your legs and numb your feet.
- If your feet are swollen, put them up when sitting or lying down.
- Talk with a foot specialist about calluses, bunions, corns, or ingrown toenails.
- See a professional foot care specialist every 4 to 5 weeks for toenail cutting if you can't do it yourself.

Do you have to rush to the bathroom?

Changes in your bladder control can be caused by:

- Weakness of the muscles that control urine flow.
- Recent changes in your normal eating and drinking routine.
- Not drinking enough fluid, as well as your caffeine and alcohol intake, can irritate the bladder.
- Side effects of medications.
- An infection.
- Prostate problems in men.
- Constipation can contribute to bladder problems.

What you can do ...

- See your doctor about any changes in your bladder control such as:
 - trouble or pain urinating
 - going to the bathroom often
 - problems getting to the bathroom on time
 - foul smelling urine
- Go to the bathroom before going to bed.
- Do not rush to the bathroom. Wear continence pads if you lose urine sometimes.
- Drink lots of fluids but limit or avoid drinks that have caffeine. Drink enough
- fluids so that your urine is light yellow in colour.
- Talk to your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist about exercises for better bladder control.



Changes in your bowels can be caused by:

- recent changes in your normal eating and drinking routine
- side effects of medications
- lack of regular activity

What you can do ...

- To avoid constipation, eat a high fibre diet which includes vegetables, fruit and whole grains. Follow the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. Available at:

<https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines/australian-guide-healthy-eating>



- Talk to your doctor about how to treat your constipation or diarrhea.
- Talk to your doctor about physical activity that is right for you.

Do you have problems with your eyesight or hearing?

Problems with your eyesight can increase your risk of falling.

What you can do ...

- See an eye doctor or optometrist once a year.
- Remove reading glasses when walking.
- Clean your glasses often. Use a non-glare cleaner and soft cloth.
- Wear sunglasses when in the sun.
- Bifocals - do not look through the lower part of the glasses when going up or down stairs. Tilt your head down to use the upper part of glasses.
- Pause and give your eyes time to adapt to changes in light.
- When carrying packages, don't block your view and keep one hand free to help with balance.

Problems with your hearing can increase your risk of falling.

What you can do ...

- Talk to your doctor if you have a decrease or change in your hearing.
- Clean your hearing aids often, learn the proper care for your hearing aid and check the batteries regularly.

Do you get enough sleep?

Not getting enough sleep can increase your risk for falling.

What you can do ...

- If you can't sleep within 20 to 40 minutes after going to bed, get up and do something like reading a book or listening to music.
- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. Do not nap in the late afternoon or the early evening.
- Avoid food and drinks with caffeine and alcohol before going to bed. Try drinking warm milk instead.
- Keep your bedroom cool and quiet. Make sure your mattress is firm and comfortable.
- Learn relaxation techniques.
- Be active during the day. Try to walk outside for 20 minutes a day.
- Limit alcohol as it reduces the amount of restful sleep you get.
- Talk with someone you trust about feeling anxious, worried sad or depressed.
- See your doctor if you have trouble sleeping.

Do you have changes in your memory or trouble concentrating?

Changes in your memory or having trouble concentrating can increase your risk of falling.

What you can do...

- Slow down, plan ahead, rest when tired, and always give yourself more time to get to places or get things done.
- Stay active both physically and mentally.
- Eat a meal every 4 hours to prevent physical weakness and mental sluggishness.
- Write down activities that need to be done during the day. You may want to use these reminders:
 - post a list in the same place such as on the refrigerator or near the phone
 - keep a journal
 - use a calendar with large spaces
- Talk with someone you can trust about feeling anxious, sad, lonely or depressed.
- Talk with your doctor, nurse or occupational therapist about if you have trouble remembering things.
- Do exercises to help keep your mind active such as playing games, doing puzzles, crosswords or word search puzzles – if you don't use it, you lose it!
- Involve a family member or community service to help you with reminders of appointments, medications and other important information.

Are you short of breath?

Being short of breath increases your risk for falling

What you can do ...

- Talk with your doctor about your shortness of breath. Be prepared to discuss when it happens and how it limits your activities.
- Talk with your doctor, nurse or occupational therapist about learning to balance your activity with rest and ways to save your energy.
- Get a flu shot every year and a pneumonia vaccine if you have not had one to prevent severe respiratory infections.
- Cut down or stop smoking with help from family, friends, or education and support programs.
- Try to stay away from places where air is polluted such as in smoking areas.
- Try to limit your outdoor activities during a poor air quality warning.
- Use pillows to prop you up in bed to help you breathe better.

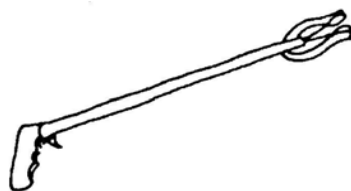
Is your home safe?

Making your home safe can help prevent a fall.

What you can do...

Bathrooms and kitchens

- Use skid-proof or non-slip mats in bathrooms, especially in bathtub.
- Store items on easy to reach shelves, counter level, or below shoulder height. Keep food and other things you use often in an area where you can easily reach them. Store heavy objects on lower shelves.
- Do not stand on a ladder, chair or stool. Do not bend down to pick things off the floor. Use a long handled reacher to pick things up.



Long handled reacher

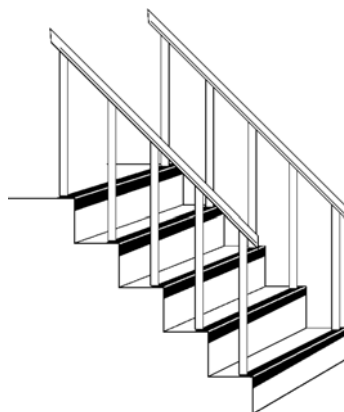
- Tack down all carpets. Remove scatter rugs.
- Put grab bars in areas where you have a hard time getting up from either a sitting or lying position. You could put them near the bathtub, toilet or your bed.
- Do not use soap holders, towel racks, sinks or countertops for support when getting in and out of the bathtub or getting on and off the toilet. They are not made to take your weight and if your hands are wet they may be slippery.
- Purchase a raised toilet seat.
- Use non-slip wax on floors.
- Wipe up spills right away and leave something to remind you a floor is wet.

Bedrooms

- Keep a lamp within easy reach where you sleep and a night light on in case you need to get up at night. Make sure that the path to the bathroom is well lit and free of clutter. Keep a night light on near
- the bathroom, bed, and hallways.
- Use non-glare bulbs that are 100 watts or greater.

Hallways and stairs

- Keep stairways and hallways clear of clutter.
- Put in hand railings on both sides of the stairway that extend beyond the last steps at the top and bottom of the stairs inside and outside of the house.



- If your stairs are not carpeted, paint the edges of the stairs a different colour or place a strip of brightly coloured tape to easily see where each step ends.

Other rooms

- Have phones in each room or carry a cordless phone around with you.
- Tape electrical cords to the floor.
- Ask an occupational therapist or physiotherapist about having your favourite chair raised slightly on a platform.
- Take your time, especially when carrying objects.
- Change arrangement of your furniture to open up the space. This is especially important if using a walking aid such as a cane.
- Watch out for sleeping pets.
- Fix or mark uneven floors.

Outside the house

- Make sure all stairs are in good repair and that there are handrails on both sides of the stairs.
- Have good lighting around all pathways and stairways outside. Install automatic or timed lighting outside.
- Paint the stair closest to the ground with a mixture of sand and paint for better gripping with your shoe.
- Avoid walking on wet leaves, snow or ice.
- Walk slowly and pay attention.
- Use a waist belt pack or backpack instead of carrying a purse.
- Avoid carrying heavy items. Use a delivery service or a portable folding cart.
- Be careful when you step off a bus.

Have you had a fall or almost had one?

Falling, slipping and tripping are not a normal part of growing older. You need to find out why this is happening and how to protect yourself. See your doctor and talk about your concerns.

Ask your doctor 3 questions to better understand your health:

1. What is my problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is this important for me to do this?

Before you visit your doctor, please review this checklist:

- I will ask the 3 questions.
- I will bring a friend or family member to help me at my doctor visit.
- I will make a list of my health concerns to tell my doctor or nurse.
- I will bring a list of all my medicines when I visit my doctor or nurse.
- I will ask my pharmacist for help when I have questions about my medicines.

What else can you do?

Talk to your Doctor or other Health Care Providers about any home care services that you may require. They will be able to provide you with advice and information about the options available to you about a range of services, including:

- house cleaning services
- transportation services
- nursing services
- respite care
- meals
- equipment needs
- 24-hour monitoring systems
- housekeeping services such as bathing, foot care, grocery shopping, home repairs, seasonal cleaning, gardening
- other services
- You may also wish to investigate the My Aged Care website (<https://www.myagedcare.gov.au>). This is the Australian Federal Government's starting point for people needing help around the house or who would like to explore the options of an aged care home placement.



What should I do if I fall?

1. **Rest** - falling is a shock.
2. **Think about your next move.** Getting help quickly after a fall is very important. It can reduce the chance of needing to stay in the hospital or having a serious health problem.
3. Are you hurt or unable to get up?
If yes, follow steps 4, 5, 6 & 7
4. Attract attention
 - Use your medical or personal alarm.
 - Try to shuffle to the phone. Call 000.
 - Bang on the wall or floor or use a stick to wave at the window.
 - Shout for help.
5. Keep warm - Use bedding, coat or tablecloth to cover your feet and legs.
6. Keep moving
 - This helps to relieve pressure areas.
 - Keep your feet and hands moving to help circulation.
7. Bladder control
 - If your bladder “lets go” while on the floor - move away from the damp area.

Notes

References

Australian & New Zealand Falls Society. Info about Falls. Available from <http://www.anzfallsprevention.org/info/>. Accessed 22 February 2021.

Sources

Adapted from “The First Step: Falls Prevention Starts With You”, The Burnaby Coalition to Prevent Falls, Simon Fraser Health Region; The Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox, and Addington Falls Prevention Coalition; and the “Ask Me 3 Program”, Partnership for Clear Health Communication.

For more information on falls and falls prevention see

The Australian & New Zealand Falls Society. <http://www.anzfallsprevention.org>.

The Better Health Channel. Older people – preventing falls at home. <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/falls-prevention-at-home>

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in healthcare. Falls prevention. <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/comprehensive-care/related-topics/falls-prevention>

Health Direct. Falls and the Elderly. <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/falls>