

Preventing falls

Follow these six steps for safety.

Falls are one of the main causes of injury which can result in a loss of independence. And your risk of falling increases as you age.

Older people fall for many reasons: poor vision, balance problems, weaker bones and muscles, side effects from medications and dangers at home.

1. Make an appointment with your provider about your medications.

When you visit your provider, bring a list of all the over-the-counter and prescription medications you take. Your provider will be able to tell you if any of the medicines or a combination may cause dizziness. Review the correct ways to take the medications. Ask if any are the same. (Even if medications have different names, they still could be used to treat the same condition.) Check to see if alcohol could interact with any of your medications and cause increased dizziness.

2. Check your eyes and ears.

If your vision is becoming weaker, it can increase your risk of falling. Certain disorders of the ear can cause balance problems. Visit your provider or specialist to have your eyes and ears checked.

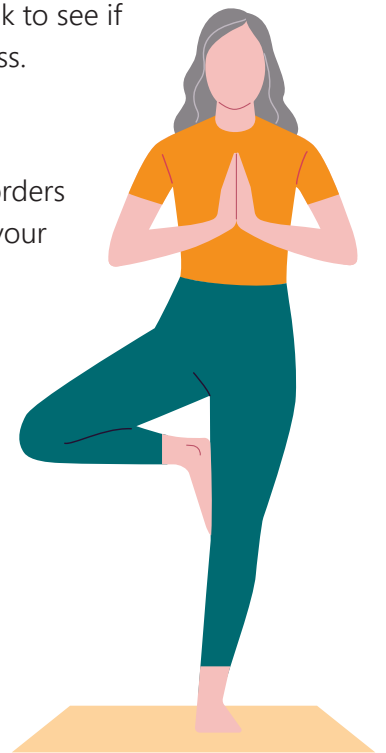
3. Exercise.

Exercising to strengthen your muscles and improve balance will go a long way toward preventing falls. Consider trying these activities:

- **Tai chi** – great for balance, coordination and confidence
- **Walking** – improves muscle strength and endurance
- **Strength training** – improves overall strength and metabolism
- **Water aerobics** – great heart and muscle exercise for people with arthritis, chronic joint pain or who may be overweight

If you're worried that exercising will increase your risk of falling even more, talk with your provider. They can recommend gentle exercises to help you get started.

You should consult your primary care provider (PCP) before beginning this or any exercise program. If you have any pre-existing conditions, limitations or experience discomfort, discontinue exercise and consult your PCP.



4. **Wear the correct kind of shoes.**

Don't overlook the obvious! High heels, floppy slippers, slip-on shoes and shoes with thick soles can make you slip and fall. Also be careful of walking around with socks and no shoes.

- Have your feet measured each time you buy shoes. Your shoe size can change.
- Buy good-fitting, sturdy shoes with nonskid soles.
- Wear laced shoes rather than slip-ons.

5. **Check your home for hazards.**

Your home could be filled with dangers that you don't even realize. Consider making the following changes:

- Remove any loose items from walkways (boxes, newspapers, cords).
- Secure loose rugs, or remove them altogether.
- Have loose floorboards repaired.
- Store items within easy reach.
- If you spill something, clean it right away.
- Use nonskid floor wax.
- Use nonslip mats in your bathtub, shower and bathroom floor. Consider a grab bar for the tub or shower.
- Make sure your home is well-lit.
- Use a night light and store a flashlight near your bed.

6. **Use a personal emergency medical response system.**

Personal emergency medical response systems are a great defense against the dangers of falling when no one is around to help you. These devices sense when you have fallen or if you have stopped moving. The system will alert family or emergency services.

We can't stop the aging process, but we can make it safer.

