



First Aid and Injury Prevention Series

Falls

Preventing and Responding to Falls and Fall-Related Injuries

While for younger individuals, most common falls lead to mild discomfort or small injuries, for older adults the risk of falls is much higher and can result in severe injuries. Bruises, broken bones, and even possible traumatic head injuries can result from a fall. Millions of older Americans fall every year, and in 2020 (the date of the latest fall injury reports among the CDC's data), over 36,000 deaths occurred as a result of a fall. The good news is, like many other injuries, falls can be prevented, and you'll find a few tips and tricks to help keep yourself or your loved ones safe below.

This month's health tips are the third in a series. For this month and the next few months, we will be presenting you with common injuries you might encounter. This series will teach you the basic of how to lower your chances of these injuries, as well as some basic first aid so you can care for someone (or yourself) if you suffer these injuries. Please note that these health tips are for educational purposes only and are no replacement for a formal First Aid course or training. To find a First Aid class in your area so that you can be qualified and prepared to act in an emergency, see our Reference section below.

Risks of Falling

Often, there are certain factors that dramatically increase the risk of a fall. Identifying if you or your loved ones have an increased risk can help you tailor your prevention strategies to address specific risk factors.

- Once someone has fallen once, they are at a higher risk for falling again.
- Individuals with lower body weakness, especially in the legs, are at higher risk of falling.
- A Vitamin D deficiency can lead to a higher fall risk.
- Certain medications, or combinations of medication, can increase your fall risk. Some of these medications are prescription, while others are available over the counter.
- Poor eyesight can contribute to a fall.
- Foot pain or wearing poor footwear can make a fall more likely.
- If there are a lot of tripping hazards (e.g., unsecured foot-rugs, shoes, extension cords, other loose items), a fall is more likely.
- Any related difficulty walking (from injury or illness) can make a fall more likely.



Prevention

Falls are, fortunately, largely preventable. Many of these steps can be taken while determining your risk factors, and each risk factor can be addressed individually as needed.

- Talk to your doctor about your overall risk for falls. Discuss your medications, and see if any of them can lead to dizziness or weakness that could lead to a fall.
- Talk to your doctor about taking Vitamin D supplements.
- Make sure to get a yearly eye check, and make sure you wear the right type of glasses. Some glasses might make objects seem further away than they are, and this can lead to tripping hazards.



- Have your doctor make sure your feet are checked out once per year and discuss your options for footwear. If necessary, see a foot specialist.
- Install handles in commonly used areas, such as bathtubs, bathrooms, and on both sides of all stairways.
- Make sure your house is well lit, especially stairwells and hallways.
- Make sure any stairways are even and unbroken. If you have carpeted staircases, make sure the carpet is secure. You can install anti-slip rubber treads to help reduce fall risk on stairs.
- Practice exercises to strengthen your legs and sense of balance, like Tai Chi.
- Keep your most commonly used items on lower shelves or within easy-to-reach places. If you must use a step-stool, never use a chair as a step-stool as it might not be steady.
- Keep objects off of the floor, and especially off of stairs.
- Make sure your pathways around the house are clear, so you don't have to avoid furniture.
- If your doctor recommends you use a cane or walker, make sure to use them when walking for additional support.
- If you have throw-rugs, consider removing them. Otherwise, make sure to securely tape them down with non-slip tape.
- Make sure extension cords and wires are taped against walls so they aren't a tripping hazard. Consider having an electrician look into installing more outlets if possible to reduce reliance on extension cords.
- Have an easy-to-reach light near your bed, like a lamp.
- Consider using a night-light for your hallway (such as the hall to the restroom) to make sure you can better see your path and possible trip hazards.
- Get light-weight curtains for your windows to help reduce daytime glare.



What to Do if Someone Falls

If you fall, or see someone else fall, there are a few things you should do. While it might be your first instinct to try and stand, or else to help someone else stand, you should avoid getting up too quickly. While a fall can be embarrassing and even painful, it's important to take your time, make sure you or others are safe, and call for the appropriate help if need be.

If you see someone else fall, you should do the following:

- First, see if they're injured or in pain (such as if they're actively grimacing or otherwise indicate they're hurt, if they can't communicate it directly).
- If they don't seem to be injured, and they think they can stand, bring over a sturdy chair and place it in front of them. If no such items can be found, ask them to crawl to the nearest bit of stable furniture.
- Have the person get into a kneeling position first using the chair, and then transition into a half-standing position. Help guide them slowly into a sitting position on the chair or other piece of furniture.
- Once they're seated, check them again for any injuries. Call their doctor or 911 if needed. If the person is taking certain medications, such as blood-thinners, it's recommended they be evaluated by a doctor to make sure they haven't suffered any bleeding or internal/head injuries.
- If the person is injured or can't get up, call 911 immediately, and stay with them until help arrives.
- Finally, check the surroundings to see if you can identify the cause of the fall. This can help you prevent similar events from happening in the future by following the steps in the sections above.



References

CPR/First Aid Training

American Heart Association – <https://cpr.heart.org/en>

American Red Cross – <https://www.redcross.org/take-a-class>

General Reference

CDC STEADI program safety brochure - www.cdc.gov/steadi/pdf/STEADI-Brochure-CheckForSafety-508.pdf

CDC Falls factsheet - www.cdc.gov/falls/facts.html

CDC STEADI program “What Can You Do?” brochure - www.cdc.gov/steadi/pdf/STEADI-Brochure-WhatYouCanDo-508.pdf

CDC STEADI program caregiver brochure - www.cdc.gov/steadi/pdf/STEADI-CaregiverBrochure.pdf

VNS Health fall response factsheet - www.vnshealth.org/patient-family-support/health-library/what-to-do-when-someone-falls/