National Fall Prevention Week: One Step Ahead of Falls

Every September, communities across the country recognize National Fall Prevention Week to raise awareness about fall risks and educate the public on ways to prevent them. Falls are one of the leading causes of injury among older adults, yet many are preventable. This observance promotes healthy aging, independence, and quality of life while supporting programs and initiatives that help keep older adults safe.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one in four adults age 65 and older experiences a fall each year. Falls are the leading cause of both fatal and nonfatal injuries in older adults, making prevention an important public health priority. National Fall Prevention Week encourages individuals, caregivers, healthcare professionals, and communities to work together to reduce fall risks through education and proactive prevention.

Common Risk Factors for Falls

Research has identified many conditions that contribute to falling. These are called risk factors. Many risk factors can be changed or modified to help prevent falls. They include:

- Lower body weakness
- Vitamin D deficiency (that is, not enough vitamin D in your body)
- Difficulties with walking and balance
- Use of medicines, such as tranquilizers, sedatives, or antidepressants. Even some over-the-counter medicines can affect balance and how steady you are on your feet.
- Vision problems
- Foot pain or poor footwear
- Home hazards or dangers, such as:
    - Broken or uneven steps
    - Throw rugs or clutter that can be tripped over

In many cases, falls are caused by a combination of risk factors and being aware of these can reduce the risk greatly.

Why are Falls So Dangerous?

While not every fall results in a serious injury, the consequences can be life-changing. The CDC reports that about 37% of falls require medical treatment or limit normal activities for at least one day.

Falls can lead to:

- Broken bones, including hip, wrist, arm, and ankle fractures
- Serious head injuries, particularly for individuals taking blood thinners
- Loss of confidence and fear of falling again, which can reduce physical activity and ultimately increase future fall risk

Preventing even one fall can help older adults maintain their independence and overall well-being.

Why National Fall Prevention Matters

National Fall Prevention Week serves as an opportunity to:

- Raise awareness about the frequency and impact of falls among older adults.
- Educate individuals on practical prevention strategies, including exercise, medication reviews, vision care, and home safety improvements.
- Encourage early action by connecting older adults with healthcare providers, community programs, and fall prevention resources.
- Strengthen community partnerships that support safe, healthy aging.

Six Steps to Prevent a Fall

1. Find a good balance and exercise program. Look to build balance, strength, and flexibility.
2. Talk to your health care provider. Ask for an assessment of your risk of falling. Share your history of recent falls.
3. Regularly review your medications with your doctor or pharmacist. Make sure side effects are not increasing your risk of falling.
4. Get your vision and hearing checked annually and update your eyeglasses. Eyes and ears are key to keeping you on your feet.
5. Keep your home safe. Remove tripping hazards, increase lighting, make stairs safe, and install grab bars in key areas.
6. Talk to your family members. Enlist their support in taking simple steps to say safe. Falls are not just a senior issue.

Home Prevention Tips:

- Removing any loose area rugs, cords, furniture or other object which could pose tripping hazards. If you use rugs, secure them to the floor with double-sided tape or replace with slip resistant rugs.
- Improving the lighting throughout your home. Nightlights are a great tool to use in every room, especially those frequented at night.
- Placing items you use frequently within easy reach.
- Using slip resistant bathmats. If needed, use a shower chair and install grab bars in shower and next to toilet.
- Installing handrails at the stairs and walkways and using them.

Health Prevention Tips:

- Enroll in a local fall prevention program.

- Increase your physical activity. Spend at least 30 minutes a day doing low impact exercises.
- Eat a well-balanced diet, rich in calcium.
- Quit smoking and limit your alcohol. Even a small amount of alcohol can affect your balance and reflexes.
- Get regular check-ups and have your doctor evaluate your medications for side effects.
- Have your vision checked yearly, especially if you experience poor depth perception, blurry vision and/or double vision.
- Wear comfortable shoes. Choosing sensible footwear can help alleviate imbalance and foot pain.

What to do After a Fall:

1. Take several deep breaths.
2. Remain still on the floor for a few minutes.
3. Before trying to get up, determine if you are hurt. Trying to get up quickly or in the wrong manner could make an injury worse.
4. Roll onto your side. Slowly get up on your hands and knees, and crawl to a sturdy chair.
5. Put your hands on the chair, slide on foot forward, and then slowly rise to a kneeling position. Turn your body to sit in the chair.
6. If you think you are hurt, don't try getting up. Ask for help or call 911.
7. Log your fall details (where, when, how) and talk about it with your doctor.

Falls are not an inevitable part of aging. With the right knowledge, healthy habits, and simple safety modifications, many falls can be prevented before they happen. National Fall Prevention Week is a reminder that small steps, whether staying active, reviewing medications, improving home safety, or scheduling regular health checkups—can make a significant difference.

By acting today, older adults can remain active, independent, and confident while reducing their risk of serious injury. Working together, families, caregivers, healthcare providers, and communities can help create safer environments and support healthy aging for everyone.

6 steps to prevent a fall

1. **Stay active**
2. **Talk to your doctor**
3. **Review your medications**
4. **Check your hearing and vision**
5. **Make your home safer**
6. **Ask for support**



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