

Fall Free: A Lesson on Fall Prevention

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Description

Falls in older adults are common. Millions of people age 65 and older fall each year, and falls are the leading cause of both fatal and nonfatal injuries among older adults; causing severe injuries such as hip fractures, head trauma and death. In this lesson, participants will learn facts about falls, strategies to prevent falls, ways to improve balance, and what to do if a fall should happen.

Lesson Goals:

Participants will learn:

- What can happen after a fall
- Strategies to prevent falls
- Their personal risk for falling
- Ways to improve balance
- What to do if a fall should happen

Handouts:

- Check your Risk for Falling

Resources/References

- Mayo Clinic
 - <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/healthy-aging/in-depth/fall-prevention/art-20047358?pg=2>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 - <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/adultfalls.html>
 - https://www.cdc.gov/steady/pdf/stay_independent_brochure-a.pdf
- National Fall Prevention Resource Center
 - <https://www.ncoa.org/healthy-aging/falls-prevention/>
- National Institutes of Health
 - <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/falls/ifyoufall/01.html>

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Discussion Question

Have you fallen before? When/how?

Facts about Falls

- Millions of people age 65 and older fall each year
- Falls are the leading cause of both fatal and nonfatal injuries among older adults—causing hip fractures, head trauma, and even death
- Every 13 seconds, an older adult is in the emergency department for a fall
- Older adults are hospitalized for fall-related injuries five times more often than for injuries from other causes

What can happen after a fall?

- Falls can cause broken bones—like arm, wrist, ankle, and hip fractures
- Falls can cause head injuries
- Many people who fall, even if they are not injured, become afraid of falling. This fear may cause a person to cut down on everyday activities

Falls Affect Independence

- Among people who fall, 20-30% suffer moderate to severe injuries such as lacerations, hip fractures, and head traumas. These injuries make it difficult to get around or live independently.
- Falls can cause traumatic brain injuries.
- Many people who fall, even if they are not injured, develop a fear of falling. This fear may cause them to limit their activities, which leads to reduced mobility and loss of physical fitness, and in turn increases their actual risk of falling.
- People age 75 and older who fall are 4 to 5 times more likely than those age 65-74 to be admitted to a long-term care facility for a year or longer.

Costs of Falling are High

- In 2013, the direct medical costs of falls, adjusted for inflation, was \$34 billion
- On average, the hospitalization cost for a fall injury is \$35,000

Preventing Falls

Make an Appointment with your Doctor

- What medications are you taking? Make a list and bring them with you for your doctor to review. Some medications may cause side effects or interactions that make you more at risk for falling.
- Have you fallen before? Write down the fall details including when, where, and how. Be prepared to discuss times when you almost fell but you were caught by someone or you grabbed hold of something just in time.
- Could your health conditions cause a fall? Certain eye and ear disorders may increase your risk of falls. Be prepared to discuss your health conditions and how comfortable you are when you walk.

Have your Eyes Checked

- Have your eyes checked by an eye doctor at least once a year and have your eyeglasses updated as needed.

Wear Sensible Shoes

- Consider changing your footwear as part of your fall-prevention plan. High heels, floppy slippers, and shoes with slick soles can make you slip, stumble, and fall. So can walking in your stocking feet.
- Wear properly fitting, sturdy shoes with non-skid soles.

Remove Home Hazards

- Remove items from walkways and high-traffic areas
- Secure loose rugs or remove them from the home
- Repair loose floorboards or carpeting
- Store items within easy reach
- Clean up spills, grease, or food
- Use non-slip mats in the bathtub or shower

Light Up Your Living Space

- Keep your home brightly lit to avoid tripping on objects that are hard to see
- Place night lights in your bedroom, bathroom, and hallways
- Place a lamp within reach of your bed for middle of the night needs
- Make clear paths of light switches that aren't near room entrances
- Turn on the lights before going up or down stairs
- Store flashlights in easy to find places in case of power outages

Use Assistive Devices

- Your doctor may recommend using an assistive device to help keep you steady and prevent a fall.
- Cane or walker
- Hand rails for stairways
- Non-slip treads in the shower
- Raised toilet seat
- Grab bars for shower or tub
- Sturdy plastic seat for shower or tub

Keep Moving!

- Physical activity can go a long way toward fall prevention
- With your doctor's OK, consider activities such as walking, water workouts, or tai chi. These activities reduce the risk of falls by improving strength, balance, and coordination.
- If you avoid physical activity because you are afraid it may make you fall; talk to your doctor.

How to Improve Your Balance

- Balance exercises can help prevent falls and avoid the disability that may result from falling.
- Types of balance exercises may include: walking backwards or sideways, walking heel to toe in a straight line, standing on one leg at a time, or standing from a sitting position.
- You can do balance exercises as often as you like
- Have a sturdy chair nearby if you feel unsteady.
- Talk with your doctor if you are unsure of any particular exercise.
- Progress your exercises by challenging yourself- hold onto the chair with one hand, then one finger, then no hands.

If you Fall...

Right After a Fall

- Take several deep breaths to try to relax.
- Remain still on the floor or ground for a few moments. This will help you get over the shock of falling.
- Decide if you're hurt before trying to get up. Getting up too quickly or in the wrong way could make an injury worse.

Getting Up from a Fall

- If you think you can get up safely without help, roll over onto your side.
- Rest again while your body and blood pressure adjust. Slowly get up on your hands and knees, and crawl to a sturdy chair.
- Put your hands on the chair seat and slide one foot forward so that it is flat on the floor. Keep the other leg bent so the knee is on the floor.
- From this kneeling position, slowly rise and turn your body to sit in the chair.
- **If you're hurt or can't get up on your own, ask someone for help or call 911. If you're alone, try to get into a comfortable position and wait for help to arrive.**
- Be sure to tell your doctor about your fall.

Handout: Check your Risk for Falling

Please circle "YES" or "NO" for each statement below.			Why it matters
Yes (2)	No (0)	I have fallen in the past year.	People who have fallen once are likely to fall again.
Yes (2)	No (0)	I use or have been advised to use a cane or walker to get around safely.	People who have been advised to use a cane or walker may already be more likely to fall.
Yes (1)	No (0)	Sometimes I feel unsteady when I am walking.	Unsteadiness or needing support while walking are signs of poor balance.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I steady myself by holding onto furniture when walking at home.	This is also a sign of poor balance.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I am worried about falling.	People who are worried about falling are more likely to fall.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I need to push with my hands to stand up from a chair.	This is a sign of a weak leg muscles, a major reason for falling.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I have trouble stepping up onto a curb.	This is also a sign of weak leg muscles.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I often have to rush to the toilet.	Rushing to the bathroom, especially at night, increases your chances of falling.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I have lost some feeling in my feet.	Numbness in your feet can cause stumbles and falls.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I take medicine that sometimes makes me feel light-headed or more tired than usual.	Side effects from medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I take medicine to help me sleep or improve my mood.	These medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I often feel sad or depressed.	Symptoms of depression such as not feeling well or feeling slowed down, are linked to falls.
TOTAL _____		Add up the number of points for each "YES" answer. If you scored 4 points or more, you may be at risk for falling. Discuss this checklist with your doctor.	

This checklist was developed by the Greater Los Angeles VA Geriatric Research Education Clinical Center and affiliates and is a validated fall risk self-assessment tool (Rubenstein et al. *J Safety Res*; 2011;42(6) 493-499). Adapted from the CDC Stay Independent brochure, 2015.