



PREVENTING FALLS: TIPS FOR SENIORS

Source: American Chiropractic Association

As we age, our bodily systems that keep us balanced and standing upright require more awareness. For example, you may not see or hear as well, which can affect your coordination. Nerves that carry information from your brain to your muscles may fray and deteriorate, slowing your reaction time and making it more difficult to move away from oncoming pedestrians or adjust to icy patches on a sidewalk. Normal declines in muscle strength and joint flexibility can hinder your ability to stand, walk and rise from chairs.

Do not let the fear of falling rule your life, however, as many falls and fall-related injuries are preventable. Through scientific studies, researchers have identified several modifiable risk factors that increase the likelihood of a fall, including medication side effects, loss of limb sensation, poor eyesight, tripping hazards within the home and lack of physical activity.

The American Chiropractic Association (ACA) recommends the following fall prevention tips:

Perform a Home Safety Check

At least one-third of all falls involve hazards within the home. Most common is that people trip over objects on the floor. See the **Home Safety Checklist** (below) and work with a family member or healthcare provider to evaluate your home for potential hazards and minimize your risk of injury.

Begin a Regular Exercise Program

Consider a general exercise program that includes activities such as walking, water workouts or tai chi, which is a gentle exercise that involves slow and graceful dance-like movements.

Exercise reduces your risk of falls by improving your strength, balance, coordination and flexibility.



In an experimental study published in the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, scientists investigated the effectiveness of tai chi in helping reduce the incidence of falls in the elderly. Patients who participated in a 12-week tai chi program, practicing Sun-style tai chi three times a week, significantly increased knee and ankle muscle strength and improved flexibility and mobility compared with a group that did not participate in the exercise program. Tai chi participants were almost twice less likely to experience a fall.



Review Your Medications

Your risk of falling may increase if you take certain prescription medications. Many medications have side effects that can affect your brain function and lead to dizziness or lightheadedness. Taking multiple medications magnifies the risk, as does combining prescription drugs with alcohol, over-the-counter allergy or sleeping medications, painkillers or cough suppressants. Medications that can increase your risk of falling include psychotropics, antiarrhythmics, diuretics and sedatives. Also, taking four or more types of medications contributes to increased fall risk. Ask your prescribing physician to review your medications and reduce your chances of falling by using the lowest effective dosage. Also, discuss the need for walking aids or supports while taking medications that can affect balance.

Have Your Vision Checked

Reduced vision increases risk of falls. Age-related vision diseases, including cataracts and glaucoma, can alter your depth perception, visual acuity and susceptibility to glare. These limitations hinder your ability to move safely. It is important to have regular check-ups with your ophthalmologist. Also, regularly clean your glasses to improve visibility.

Snellen chart for adults



Preventing Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis makes bones less resistant to stress and more likely to fracture. Caused by hormonal changes, calcium and vitamin D deficiencies and a decrease in physical activity, osteoporosis is a chief cause of fractures in older adults, especially women.

To help limit the effects of osteoporosis, be sure to eat or drink sufficient calcium. Calcium-rich foods include milk, yogurt, cheese, fish and shellfish, broccoli, soybeans, collards and turnip greens, tofu and almonds. In addition, consume sufficient amounts of vitamin D to enhance the absorption of calcium into the bloodstream. Vitamin D is formed naturally in the body after exposure to sunlight, but most adults need a supplement.



Home Safety Checklist

Use this checklist as you walk through each room in your home and check for hazards. You should check off each item in this list (when applicable to your home). If you are unable to check off an item, be sure to fix it within an appropriate time frame.

ALL LIVING SPACES

- Remove throw rugs
- Secure carpet edges
- Remove low furniture and objects on the floor.
- Reduce clutter
- Remove cords and wires on the floor
- Check adequate lighting at night (especially along the path to the bathroom)
- Secure carpet or treads on stairs
- Install handrails on the staircases
- Eliminate chairs that are too low to sit in and get out of easily
- Do not wax your floors – or use non-skid wax
- Ensure that the telephone can be reached from the floor

BATHROOMS

- Install grab bars in the bathtub/shower and by the toilet
- Use rubber mats in the bathtub/shower (be sure they are secure)
- Take up floor mats when you aren't using the bathtub/shower to avoid tripping over them
- Install a raised toilet seat

OUTDOORS

- Repair cracked sidewalks
- Install handrails on stairs and steps
- Trim shrubbery along the pathway to the home
- Install adequate lighting by doorways and along walkways leading to doors

For more information on prevention and wellness, give our office a call today.

770-461-8781