



Mississippi

Trauma Care System Foundation

Falls put you at risk of serious injury. From reviewing your medications to hazard-proofing your home, reducing your risk of falls is beneficial to you and those dear to you.

I am Doing my Best Not to Fall!

No one plans to fall. My aging mother would often say, “If I fall, it will be unavoidable because I am doing everything that I can to prevent a fall.” Her intentions were good, but there were fall risks everywhere that she had not identified. Moreover, she made too many trips up and down her home steps and is mostly blinded by macular degeneration. I have counseled fifty-five-year-old men in the hospital recovering from surgery. These men of 250 pounds are asking their 120 wives to help them to the restroom. The chances of that wife supporting that husband in a fall are unlikely. So, here are some reminders for you and those that you love.

Fall prevention: What Can I Do?

As you get older, physical changes and health conditions, and sometimes the medications used to treat those conditions make falls more likely. In fact, falls are a leading cause of injury among older adults. Still, the fear of falling does not need to lead to anxiety. Instead, take these steps to safety.

1. Talk to your doctor

Begin your fall-prevention plan by making an appointment with your doctor to discuss three things:

- **What medications are you taking?** Make a list of your prescription and over-the-counter drugs and supplements, or bring them with you to the appointment. Sometimes, medicines without side effects may lead to side-effects when taken in combination without prescriptions. Since you may be prescribed medication for more than one practitioner, someone should review them all to decide if they may increase your risk of falling. This is especially

important if you take prescriptions that make you tired, sleepy or affect your thinking.

- **Have you fallen before?** Write down the specifics, including when, where and how you fell. Do not be afraid to talk about times when you almost fell but were caught by someone or managed to grab hold of something to prevent a complete fall.
- **What other health conditions increase my fall risk?** Weakness is a concern. Some eye and ear disorders may increase your risk of falls. Do you fear that you may fall? Do you have any dizziness, joint pain, shortness of breath, or numbness in your feet and legs when you walk?

2. Walk



That is right - walk! If your doctors determine that it is safe to continue walking, physical activity can go a long way toward fall prevention. Activities such as walking, water aerobics, and other gentle exercises that involve slow and graceful movements reduce the risk of falls by improving strength, balance, coordination, and flexibility. You may benefit from a Physical Therapy exercise program.

3. Wear sensible shoes

High heels, floppy slippers, and shoes with slick soles can make you slip, stumble, and fall. Walking in your stocking feet is also risky. Instead, wear properly fitting, sturdy shoes with nonskid soles. Sensible shoes may also reduce joint pain.

4. Look around your home.

Your living room, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, hallways, and stairways may be filled with hazards. To make your home safer:

- Remove boxes, newspapers, electrical cords, and phone cords from walkways.
- Move coffee tables, magazine racks, and plant stands from high-traffic areas.
- Secure loose rugs with double-faced tape, tacks, or a slip-resistant backing — or remove loose rugs from your home.
- Repair loose wooden floorboards and carpeting right away.
- Store clothing, dishes, food, and other necessities within easy reach.
- Immediately clean spilled liquids, grease, or food.
- Use nonslip mats in your bathtub or shower. Use a bath seat, which allows you to sit while showering.

YOU CAN PREVENT FALLS

5. Brighten up your world.

You may want to add extra lighting to avoid tripping on objects that are hard to see. Also:

- 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 to light switches that are not near room entrances. Consider trading traditional switches for glow-in-the-dark or illuminated switches.
- Turn on the lights before going up or downstairs.
- Store flashlights in easy-to-find places in case of power outages.

6. Take advantage of safety equipment.

Your doctor might recommend using a cane or walker to keep you steady. Other assistive devices can help, too. For example:

- Handrails for both sides of stairways
- Nonslip treads for bare-wood steps
- A raised toilet seat or one with armrests
- Grab bars for the shower or tub
- A sturdy plastic seat for the shower or tub
- A hand-held shower nozzle for bathing while sitting down

