

Falling . . . it's something most seniors would rather not think about. Yet falls are a leading cause of injury, can prevent individuals from staying in their own home, and can cause death among seniors. Several factors can lead to a fall, including physical inactivity and hazards around the home and yard.

It is important to pay attention to areas where you may be at risk and to learn simple steps that can help prevent falls in your home. This brochure is designed to help you understand those risk factors and assess your home for safety to help YOU in "staying steady on your feet."

### **H**ave you had an unexplained trip or fall in the last year?

Explore your risk factors and determine what caused your fall.

### **H**ave you been affected by stroke, Parkinson's disease, dementia, coronary heart disease, osteoporosis, or arthritis.

Older adults are affected by many health conditions that can increase their risk of falls. Because of these conditions, it is important that you keep as active as possible to maintain your strength, balance, and flexibility to reduce your risk of falling.

### **I**s your home free from worn or torn floor/stair covering and slippery surfaces?

Remove or repair frayed carpet edges or use wide strong tape to fix them down. Make sure your stairway carpet is securely fixed. Mop up spills immediately, and spread salt or sand on wet or icy surfaces to make them less slippery.

### **A**re your stairways safe?

Install and use handrails on both sides of your stairs and make sure they're securely mounted. Try highlighting the edge of steps with white paint or brightly colored tape to make them more visible. If you have something to carry upstairs, use the handrail. If your hands are full, it is much safer to make two trips.



*A guide to knowing risk factors and ways to prevent falls*

**D**o you experience light headedness, dizzy spells or low blood pressure?

A drop in your blood pressure may occur when you get up from a bed or chair. This may cause you to be light headed or dizzy. This can be helped by sitting up for a few minutes after lying down before you stand up and also by swinging your legs and tapping your toes to get your blood pumping before standing up. It is important to drink plenty of fluids during the day to maintain blood volume and help your blood pressure.

**D**o you suffer from poor vision?

Poor vision can cause trips and falls. Cataracts, macular degeneration, and glaucoma can affect your perception or make it difficult for you to see obstacles. Make sure you have regular eye checks.

**D**o you take regular medication or more than four medicines a day?

Many medicines used to treat disease can cause problems with balance and dizziness. Taking four or more medications regularly can increase your risk of falling. Your risk of falling may increase if you take diuretics, sedatives, or other sleeping medications; high blood pressure medications; or medications for some psychological conditions.

**D**o you have problems sleeping?

Insomnia can result in drowsiness and dull reactions because of tiredness. This can make moving around more hazardous. Physical activity and exercise can help you sleep better.

**D**o you experience low mood or depression?

Low mood or depression can affect your sleeping and may result in your being tired. Some types of antidepressants can affect your energy levels and balance, particularly during the night and in the morning. Physical activity and exercise can help relieve your low mood.

**D**o you eat a well-balanced, healthy diet?

A diet of foods filled with sufficient vitamins and minerals can help boost energy levels, muscle strength, and bone health. A healthy and varied diet can do much to prevent problems.

**D**o you have difficulty walking or getting up from a low chair/toilet?

This may mean that your muscles are weak, and your joints are stiff. Regular exercise can help to strengthen muscles and improve flexibility, balance, and coordination.

**D**o you need to hold onto something to help you keep your balance?

Weak muscles or joints can cause poor balance. Regular physical activity and exercise can improve health and well being and help with balance problems.

**D**o you have problems carrying things?

Increasing your strength through regular exercise can help improve your ability to carry things.

**I**s your footwear and clothing appropriate?

Loose fitting or open-backed slippers, sandals, and high heels can be risky footwear that can cause you to trip or knock you off balance. Choose thin-soled or flat shoes with a built-up heel. Avoid walking in socks or tights on slippery floors.

**I**s your house an appropriate temperature with sufficient lighting?

Poor lighting in areas such as stairways and kitchens can increase the risk of falling. Always remember to turn the light on at night if you are walking around the house or going to the bathroom. Monitor the temperature in your home. If you get cold, you can get stiff, less mobile, and feel more tired.

**A**re your rooms and stairways free of clutter?

Clutter is a risk because you can trip over it, especially at night or if you have poor eyesight. Try to store frequently used things safely and in appropriate places so you do not need to stoop down or stretch up to reach them. Think about rearranging the furniture in your main living area to help you move around more freely. Take care if you have pets. You may not see them in the shadows or when they are moving.

**D**o you have loose mats or electrical cords in areas that may pose a risk for tripping?

Tape down or use non-slip mats under rugs particularly in the bathroom and bedroom or consider removing them completely. Keep electrical and telephone cords tucked out of the way.