



# Beyond Balance Living Safe At Home

A Guide to Fall Prevention

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## About Falls



A fall is defined as “an unintentional change in position from a higher level to a lower level.” The key word is unintentional—falls are accidents. Two-thirds of those that fall will fall again within six months. Two-thirds of falls are preventable. There are many reasons that someone can be at risk for falling. Many times it is due to a disease or disorder which affects the balance systems in the body. Certain medicine you may be taking can increase your risk for falling. Treatments to minimize your risks for falling involve trying to improve your balance and help you adapt to limitations.

### OVERVIEW

There are three main systems in the body that control balance: your vision, your ears (vestibular sense) and your feet (sensory signals come up to your brain from your feet). In some cases your risk for falls may be due to one system and sometimes all systems can be the cause. Treatment to minimize your risk for falling can involve trying to improve the balance systems. For example, you could do balance exercises to help you move around better and more safely. Alternatively, treatment may be about minimizing the risk of falling by giving you tools or adapting your environment. An example of this would be improving the lighting in your home or removing obstacles that might cause you to trip and fall.

### OUTLOOK

Many studies have shown that by working on your balance and strength you can greatly reduce your risk of falling. Also, there have been good results shown by improving your home set-up to keep you safe. It is important to learn about your specific fall risks and what you can do to stay safe in your home.

Managing risks for falls is a partnership between you, your doctor, and your home care team.



# Managing Your Risk for Falls



Learning to recognize the cause of falls will help you take action and stay safe.

## BALANCE PROBLEMS

Know how you are limited by your balance. If you are unsteady when walking use devices to help you stay steady such as a cane or walker. Recognize that you are at risk for falling but do not become too fearful or guarded in your movements.

## WEAKNESS OR FATIGUE

When you are tired you do not have as much strength to support your body. Be aware of when you are tired and rest to gain back stability for your movements.

## DIZZINESS OR FEELING LIGHTEADED (FAINTNESS)

Know what triggers (brings on) your dizziness. Sometimes it is when you turn your head, other times it is getting up from sitting to standing.

## HAZARDS IN YOUR HOME

Cluttered spaces with trip hazards contribute to your fall risk. The bathroom is the main area where problems occur due to slippery surfaces and the tasks that you perform there (toileting and showering). Your therapist will make suggestions to improve your home set-up and help you practice tasks safely.

## SIDE EFFECTS OF CERTAIN MEDICINES YOU TAKE

Certain medicines can cause dizziness or other symptoms that make you more apt to lose your balance or become unsteady. The nurse will work with you and your doctor to help minimize such medicines and/or their effects.

### MY RISKS FOR FALLING:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

# Your Medicine is Important



- When you start taking a new medicine, have your doctor or pharmacist review all of your medicines including over the counter medicine.
- Keep a list of your medicines including the dose, frequency, and date it was started.
- Know the side effects and drug interactions of your medicines. Ask your nurse how to reduce these.
- Notify or see your doctor if you feel unsteady. If you have fallen let your doctor know even if you are not injured.
- Check your medicine for a warning label and follow it.
- Store medicine in the original container and discard outdated medicines.
- Never take another person's medicine.
- Use a pillbox—this prevents you from missing a dose or taking a double dose.
- Take only the dose of medicine prescribed for you by your doctor at the same time every day, even if you feel fine! Do not take more or less without first talking with your doctor.
- Talk to your doctor before starting a new over-the-counter medicine, vitamin or supplement.
- If you forget to take your medicines, do not try to catch up by taking more than one dose at a time. If two or more doses are missed, call your pharmacist or doctor for instructions to get back on schedule.
- Reorder medicines when you are down to a one-week supply.
- Store your medicines safely and keep them out of reach of children and pets.





# Medicines that can Increase Fall Risk



## DIURETICS

**Examples:** Lasix, Bumex, Diazide, Aldactone

- Used to help your body get rid of extra fluid.
- If you are to take twice a day—take the second dose in the afternoon. This will avoid trips to the bathroom during the night.
- Side effects may be: dizziness.

## ANTIHYPERTENSIVES

**Examples:** Corgard, Zestril, Cozaar, Norvasc, Calan

- Used to control high blood pressure.
- Side effects may be: depression, constipation, dizziness, headache, irregular or rapid heartbeat, lightheadedness or weakness when standing up suddenly or getting up in the morning.

## PSYCHOTROPIC

**Examples:** Abilify, Haldol, Risperdal, Celexa, Effexor, Ativan

- Used to control psychotic symptoms such as: anxiety, depression, sleep disorder, psychosis.
- Side effects may be: dizziness, dry mouth, drowsiness, rapid heart rate, restlessness.

## BENZODIAZEPINES

**Examples:** Xanax, Librium, Klonopin, Tanxene, Valium

- Used to treat anxiety, insomnia, seizures.
- Side effects may be: dizziness, drowsiness, confusion, impaired coordination, visual disturbances.

## SEDATIVES

**Examples:** Ambien, Lunesta, Restoril, Dalmane

- Used to treat sleep disorders.
- Side effects may be: nervousness, headache, irritability, tremor, impaired coordination, rapid heart rate, nausea.

## ANTIDEPRESSANTS

**Examples:** Abilify, Celexa, Paxil, Serzone, Zoloft

- Used to treat depression.
- Side effects may be: fatigue, nausea, headache, dry mouth, dizziness, constipation, drowsiness.

## NARCOTICS & OTHER PAIN MEDICINE

**Examples:** Norco, Vicodin, MS Contin, Percocet, Ultram

- Used to control severe pain.
- Side effects may be: constipation, dizziness, drowsiness, nausea.

## ANTIHISTAMINES

**Examples:** Allegra, Benadryl, Claritin, Tavist, Zyrtec

- Used to control symptoms related to allergies (sneezing, runny nose, watery eyes).
- Side effects may be: dry mouth, drowsiness, dizziness, restlessness, blurred vision.

## DIABETIC MEDICINE

**Examples:** Glucotrol, Micronase, Diabeta, Prandin, Glucophage, Metformin, Januvia, Avandia, Insulin

- Used to lower blood sugar levels.
- Side effects may be: sweating, palpitations, dizziness, anxiety, trembling, irritability, confusion.

# Getting Up Safely



Changing positions quickly, such as from lying down to sitting up or from sitting to standing, can cause dizziness. This happens due to a condition called Postural Hypotension where there is a sudden drop in blood pressure. This can result in fainting and/or falling. Another cause of falling, or balance loss, can be related to problems with the structures in your ear (or vestibular system). Both conditions place you at risk for falling so it is important to follow the tips listed below.

## TIPS TO PREVENT LOSS OF BALANCE WHEN GETTING UP:

- Sit at the edge of the bed or couch for **30-60 seconds** when moving from lying down to a standing position.
- Get up slowly: clench your fists and flex your ankles **10** times before getting up.
- Walk in place for **1 minute** after standing before walking away.
- Have someone stand by when you are moving into a standing position ready to help you as needed.
- Place your walking aids (e.g. walker) in front of you so they can be used for support once standing.
- Do not bend over at the waist to reach for something low.
- Do not rise too quickly after a meal as this can cause hypotension.
- Drink at least 8 glasses of water each day (if you are NOT restricted by your doctor on how much fluid or liquids you can have).



# Managing the Hazards in Your Home



## ENTRY/EXITS TO THE HOME

- If you have stairs install a railing.
- Have entry ways well lit.
- Have a place to set items when entering the home.

## HALLWAYS

- Keep hallways well-lit and free of clutter.
- Be aware of pets in hallways and throughout your home. It is easy to trip over them.

## KITCHEN

- Sit rather than stand whenever possible.
- Place items within reach to avoid bending down low or reaching up high.

## LIVING ROOM

- Remove rugs or secure them to eliminate the trip hazard.
- Reduce/Remove clutter.
- Keep cords safely tucked away.

## BEDROOM

- Place items used frequently in easy-to-reach places.
- Organize your nightstand- keep a lamp, phone, life alert device within reach.
- Keep pathways clear from your bed to other areas you need to access.
- Make sure cords or other items are not left out as trip hazards.

## BATHROOM

- Secure grab bars in locations where you need a little more support.
- A shower chair or bench can allow you to sit for the shower and get into and out of the tub safely.
- Remove rugs or use non-slip rugs to prevent falls.

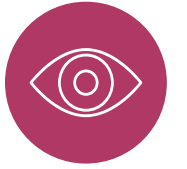
**TIPS FOR YOU ON SETTING UP A SAFE HOME:** \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

# Fall Prevention and Low Vision



If you have trouble seeing clearly you are at a greater risk for falling. The suggestions below are to help you function more safely with vision loss.

## ENHANCE CONTRAST

- Contrast dark and light colors.
- Place a darker bathmat in a white tub.
- Use colored soap that contrasts to the tub and floor.
- Use brightly colored tape or paint to emphasize contrast or depth on steps, ramps, and doors.
- Select contrasting colors of footwear and the floor surface.
- Mark the edges of transitions between surfaces with contrasting colors.

## LIGHTING SOURCE—USE APPROPRIATE ILLUMINATION

- Use bright lights (halogen or alternative light bulbs).
- Properly direct light – either directly on the object, or away if there is a glare.
- Ceiling lighting is more effective than a shaded lamp.
- Use three-way bulbs for quick and easy adjustments throughout the day.
- Avoid fluorescent lights.
- Place dark switch plates on light walls- or light switch plates on dark walls to make turning lights on easier.

## GLARE CONTROL

- Wear a visor or a hat with a brim.
- Use window treatments.
- Wear tinted lenses over prescription eyewear.

## STAY ORGANIZED

- Store kitchen and bathroom items consistently in the same place.
- Organize your closet by colors- place navy clothes at one end, black at the other, brown in the middle; then put lighter colors in between.



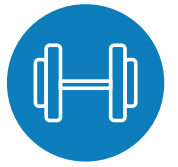
## Basics for Better Balance



- Maintain an adequate base of support by standing with your feet, hip-width apart.
- If you feel you are going to lose your balance, move your feet farther apart.
- If a fall is likely to occur, lower your center of gravity by crouching or gently bending your knees.
- Keep your center of gravity over your body. Try not to lean your head too far forward.
- Wear rubber soled shoes. Good footwear is important to stability.
- Focus your eyes on a stationary object rather than on a moving object.
- Imagine you have good balance for 3 minutes 3 times a day.
- Perform your balance exercises as directed by your therapist each day.
- If you feel more unsteady than usual modify your activity level and ask for help to complete your daily tasks.



## Balance and Strengthening Exercises



You can improve your overall function by performing specific exercises tailored to reduce your risk for falling.

### HOW TO PERFORM YOUR BALANCE AND STRENGTHENING EXERCISES

- Always warm up (walk for 5 minutes) and cool down (slowly decrease the intensity of the activity). There are specific exercises recommended for you to use to warm up.
- Never hold your breath when exercising.
- The strengthening exercises should be performed three times each week with a day of rest in between. Your therapist will determine the level of difficulty of your exercises. Your therapist will help you set up this routine.
- The day after you are more active your muscles may be sore, that is why it is important to take one day off in between the exercises.
- When doing a strengthening exercise, it should not be so difficult that you have to strain.
- When doing the balance exercises you should do them exactly as instructed. They should be challenging but you should be safe performing them.
- If you feel weaker or less steady wait until your therapist evaluates you again as adjustments in your program may be needed.



# Making the Most of Your Doctor's Appointment



### PREPARE FOR YOUR APPOINTMENT

- Bring a current list of all your medicines to every appointment.
- Write down a list of things you want to talk to your doctor about—take this with you.

### DURING YOUR APPOINTMENT

- Write down your doctor's instructions. This will help you remember what was said once you get home.
- If you do not understand, ask your doctor to repeat what he has said until you understand.
- Let your doctor know:
  - What your concerns/fears are—so they can be addressed.
  - If you are having difficulty taking your medicines or following any other instructions.
  - Even if you think something is minor—it might be important.

REMEMBER—staying safe in your home is a partnership between you and your health care team. Keeping you safe and in your home is EVERYONE'S #1 goal.



# My Action Plan



### MY GOAL

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### HOW IMPORTANT IS THIS GOAL TO YOU?

“How important would you say it is for you to \_\_\_\_\_?”  
On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all important and 10 is extremely important, where would you say you are?” Mark on the ruler below.



### HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU THAT YOU CAN DO THIS?

“How confident would you say you are that if you decided to \_\_\_\_\_ you could do it?” On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all confident and 10 is extremely confident, where would you say you are?” Mark on the ruler below.



### WHAT DIFFICULTIES TO REACHING YOUR GOAL ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT?

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# When to Call Your Doctor About Your Health



Your doctor wants you to report changes in how you feel. Treating symptoms early can keep you at home and prevent you from going to the hospital.

**“My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I have a history of \_\_\_\_\_. I am not feeling well. The doctor told me to call him when I have changes in how I feel.”**

## USE THIS CHECKLIST TO HELP EXPLAIN HOW YOU FEEL:

- I am feeling dizzy and it's not going away.
- I am feeling more unsteady than usual.
- I have a temperature greater than 100.5° F.
- I have more than usual swelling in my feet, hands or abdomen.
- I have had temporary numbness, difficulty moving, difficulty raising my arms, talking or my mouth droops on one side, that only lasts for a short time.
- I am having increased difficulty doing activities I can usually do.
- I get short of breath even when sitting.
- I am coughing up yellow (or green) sputum.
- I am having increased coughing or choking when I swallow, or ea.
- I am having increased heart palpations (feels like heart flip/flops).
- I am having increased chest pain, which goes away, but is happening more often.
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## IT IS IMPORTANT TO LET YOUR DOCTOR KNOW:

- If you have not been taking all of your medicine.
- If you have seen another doctor and he/she changed any of your medicines.

Ask when someone will call you back with instructions. If you don't hear back from the doctor's office within 3 hours, call the office again.

# Discharge Plan: Instructions for Staying Safe



- Keep your medicine list updated. Take this list to all doctor appointments.
- Don't miss any of your doctor appointments. Use a calendar to keep track of appointments.

Your next appointment is: \_\_\_\_\_ With Dr. \_\_\_\_\_

- Use your Exercise tracking form to keep up your home program.
- Activity plan \_\_\_\_\_
- Notify your doctor about changes to your health.

- \_\_\_ Any falls that occur
- \_\_\_ Increased dizziness/weakness
- \_\_\_ Any changes in your medicines

Thank you for allowing us to help you stay safe in your home. We wish you continued success. Please don't hesitate to call us if your healthcare needs change in the future.

Other instructions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**CALL 911** CALL 911 IF YOU CANNOT BREATHE, HAVE CHEST PAIN THAT WILL NOT GO AWAY OR YOUR SYMPTOMS GET WORSE



# Call Your Home Agency First



We can help you manage your health symptoms and avoid hospitalization if you call your Home Care Agency first.

