

# Factors Contributing to a Fall PLUS Ways to Help Prevent a Fall

**Balance declines with age. Many factors contribute toward making the older adult susceptible to falls.**

These include:

- Impaired hearing and vision
- General loss of muscular strength and tone
- Arthritis
- Osteoporosis (Many people think osteoporosis is only a problem for women past menopause, but it can also affect older men. Weak bones can mean that even a minor fall might be dangerous.)
- Vertigo
- Cerebrovascular insufficiency
- Neurologic disability (stroke)
- Postural hypotension (sudden decrease in blood pressure)
- Illness
- Diabetes
- Thyroid disease
- Medication that causes dizziness

Don't let a fear of falling keep you from being active. Doing things like getting together with friends, gardening, walking, or going to the local senior center are also important for staying healthy. The good news is that there are simple ways to prevent most falls.

**By taking care of your overall health, you may be able to lower your chances of falling.**

Here are a few hints to help avoid falls and broken bones:

- Learn how strong your bones are. Ask your doctor about a special test called a bone mineral density test. If this test shows your bones are weak, your doctor can tell you how to make them stronger and less likely to break.

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- Stay physically active. Plan an exercise program that is right for you. Regular exercise makes you stronger and improves muscles. It also helps keep your joints, tendons, and ligaments flexible.
- Mild weight-bearing activities, such as walking or climbing stairs, may slow bone loss from osteoporosis.
- Have your eyes and hearing tested often. Even small changes in sight and hearing can put you at risk for falling. When you get new eyeglasses, take time to get used to them. Always wear your glasses when you need them. If you have a hearing aid, be sure it fits well, and wear it.
- Find out about the side effects of any medicine you take. If a drug makes you sleepy or dizzy, tell your doctor or pharmacist.
- Get enough sleep. If you are sleepy, you are more likely to fall.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink. Even a small amount can affect your balance and reflexes.
- Stand up slowly after eating, lying down, or sitting. Getting up too quickly can cause your blood pressure to drop. That can make you feel faint.
- Use a cane, walking stick, or walker to help you feel steadier when you walk. This is very important when you're walking in areas you don't know well or in places where the walkways are uneven.
- Wear rubber-soled, low-heeled shoes that fully support your feet. Wearing only socks or shoes/slippers with smooth soles on stairs or floors without carpet can be unsafe.
- And, always tell your doctor if you have fallen since your last checkup—even if you aren't hurt when you fall.

Source: National Institute for Health

