

What Are Ways to Prevent Falls and Related Fractures?

Fast Facts: An Easy-to-Read Series of Publications for the Public

Falls are serious at any age, but especially for older people who are more likely to break a bone when they fall.

If you have a disease called osteoporosis, you are more likely to break a bone if you fall. Osteoporosis is called the “silent disease” because bones become weak with no symptoms. You may not know that you have it until a strain, bump, or fall causes a bone to break.

Falls are especially dangerous for people with osteoporosis. If you break a bone, you might need a long time to recover. Learning how to prevent falls can help you avoid broken bones and the problems they can cause.

Why Do People Fall?

Some of the reasons people fall are:

- Tripping or slipping due to loss of footing or traction
- Slow reflexes, which make it hard to keep your balance or move out of the way of a hazard
- Balance problems
- Reduced muscle strength
- Poor vision
- Illness
- Taking medicines
- Drinking alcohol.

Illness and some medicines can make you feel dizzy, confused, or slow. Medicines that may increase the risk of falls are:

- Blood pressure pills
- Heart medicines
- Diuretics (water pills)
- Muscle relaxants
- Sleeping pills.

Drinking alcohol can lead to a fall because it can:

- Slow your reflexes
- Cause you to feel dizzy or sleepy
- Alter your balance
- Cause you to take risks that can lead to falls.

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How Can I Prevent Falling?

At any age, people can make changes to lower their risk of falling. Some tips to help prevent falls outdoors are:

- Use a cane or walker
- Wear rubber-soled shoes so you don't slip
- Walk on grass when sidewalks are slick
- Put salt or kitty litter on icy sidewalks.

Some ways to help prevent falls indoors are:

- Keep rooms free of clutter, especially on floors
- Use plastic or carpet runners
- Wear low-heeled shoes
- Do not walk in socks, stockings, or slippers
- Be sure rugs have skid-proof backs or are tacked to the floor
- Be sure stairs are well lit and have rails on both sides
- Put grab bars on bathroom walls near tub, shower, and toilet
- Use a nonskid bath mat in the shower or tub
- Keep a flashlight next to your bed
- Use a sturdy stepstool with a handrail and wide steps
- Add more lights in rooms
- Buy a cordless phone so that you don't have to rush to the phone when it rings and so that you can call for help if you fall.

You can also do exercises to improve your balance. While holding the back of a chair, sink, or counter:

- Stand on one leg at a time for a minute and then slowly increase the time. Try to balance with your eyes closed or without holding on.
- Stand on your toes for a count of 10, and then rock back on your heels for a count of 10.
- Make a big circle to the left with your hips, and then to the right. Do not move your shoulders or feet. Repeat five times.

How Can I Prevent Broken Bones if I Fall?

Sometimes you cannot prevent a fall. If you do fall, you can try to prevent breaking a bone. Try to fall forwards or backwards (on your buttocks), because if you fall to the side you may break your hip. You can also use your hands or grab things around you to break a fall. Some people wear extra clothes to pad their hips or use special hip pads.

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How Can I Keep My Bones Healthy?

Some ways to protect your bones are:

- Get 1,000 to 1,200 mg of calcium each day
- Get 200 to 600 IU of vitamin D each day
- Walk, climb stairs, lift weights, or dance each day
- Talk with your doctor about having a bone mineral density (BMD) test
- Talk with your doctor about taking medicine to make your bones stronger.

Daily Need for Calcium and Vitamin D

Age	Calcium	Vitamin D
19 to 30 years	1,000 mg	200 IU
31 to 50 years	1,000 mg	200 IU
51 to 70 years	1,200 mg	400 IU
Over 70 years	1,200 mg	600 IU
Safe Upper Limit	2,500 mg	2,000 IU

Source: National Academy of Sciences, 1997

For More Information on Preventing Falls and Other Related Conditions:

NIH Osteoporosis and Related Bone Diseases~National Resource Center

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For the NIA publication on fall prevention, go to: www.niapublications.org/agepages/falls.asp on the Web.

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For Your Information

For updates and for any questions about any medications you are taking, please contact the U.S. Food and Drug Administration at 1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332, a toll-free call) or visit their Web site at www.fda.gov.