

Colorado Gerontological Society

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), at least one-third of older adults in the U. S. fall each year, causing 18,000 deaths and 18 million emergency room visits. In fact, falls are the second leading cause of unintentional injury deaths in the U. S. Falls among older adults lead to injuries, such as hip fractures, which, in turn, result

in death within one year about 20 percent of the time. Among the elderly, hip fractures are the most serious consequence of falling. The older an individual when they fall, the more likely they are to be admitted to a nursing home according to the CDC.

**RISK FACTORS FOR FALLING**

Take the following survey to assess your risk of falling and then discuss the results with your health care provider. If you answer yes to any of these questions, you are at a greater risk of falling.

	Yes	No
1. Have you fallen in the last 12 months?		
2. Do you have difficulty seeing clearly?		
3. When seated, do you have trouble getting back up?		
4. When you stand, do you sometimes feel light-headed, dizzy or off-balance?		
5. Do you take four or more medicines each day, including non-prescription remedies?		
6. Are you depressed or feeling down?		
7. Is it sometimes hard to walk because you feel stiff, weak or your feet hurt?		
8. Do you sometimes make frequent or hurried trips to the bathroom?		
9. Do you limit your activities because you are afraid you might fall?		
10. At home, is it sometimes difficult to move around safely because items you need are hard to reach or have to be carried?		

## Treatment & Management

- Repair pavement irregularities
- Eliminate poor lighting in traffic areas and on stairs
- Carpet slippery floors
- Wear shoes that are sturdy and fit properly; consider lace-up shoes, rather than slip-ons
- Clean eyeglasses daily
- Use visual adaptations including contrast for stairs
- Use grab bars and rails for support
- Participate in A Matter of Balance class to improve balance exercises .
- Enroll in Tai Chi and Yoga for balance improvement
- Get a walking stick, cane, or walker if you experience balance problems, dizziness, or light-headedness. Protective Hip Pads are available to reduce the risk of hip fractures.
- Reduce lower hip fracture by getting adequate calcium and vitamin D. Ask your provider to check your levels yearly if needed.
- Undertake a program of weight bearing exercise and be screen for osteoporosis.
- Have an Annual Wellness Visit that is covered by Medicare. Vital signs, mental status testing, Cardiac, Musculoskeletal, Neurological, Proprioception, Vision, Hearing, Gait and Balance Testing.

## OUTDOOR SAFETY TIPS

- ⇒ Wear low-heeled shoes with rubber soles for more solid footing (traction), and wear warm boots in winter.
- ⇒ Use handrails as you go up and down steps and on escalators.
- ⇒ If sidewalks look slippery, walk in the grass for more solid footing.
- ⇒ In winter, carry a small bag of rock salt or kosher salt in your pocket or car. You can then sprinkle the salt (or kitty litter) on sidewalks or streets that are slippery.
- ⇒ Look carefully at floor surfaces in public buildings. Floors made of highly polished marble or tile can be very slippery. When these surfaces are wet, they may become dangerous. When floors have plastic or carpet runners in place, stay on them whenever possible.
- ⇒ Keep your porch, deck, walkways and driveway free of leaves, snow, trash or clutter. Cover porch steps with a gritty, weatherproof paint and install handrails on both sides.
- ⇒ Turn on the light outside your front door before leaving your home in the early evening or install a motion sensor so that you have outdoor light when you return after dark.
- ⇒ Use a shoulder bag, fanny pack or a backpack purse to leave your hands free.
- ⇒ Use a walker or cane as needed.
- ⇒ Find out about community services that can provide help, such as 24-hour pharmacies and grocery stores that take orders by phone or Internet and deliver, especially in poor weather.
- ⇒ Stop at curbs and check the height before stepping up or down. Be careful at curbs that have been cut away to allow access for bikes or wheelchairs. The incline may lead to a fall.
- ⇒ Consider wearing hip protectors or hip pads for added protection should you fall.

*Source: National Institute of Health*



## Questions For Your Doctor

- Are any of the medications that I am currently taking likely to cause falls? How about the interactions between medications?
- Are there problems with my feet that may be causing me to fall, such as bunions?
- Are the shoes that I am wearing appropriate for my current health condition(s)?
- Would occupational therapy or physical therapy help to prevent falls?

## TIPS

- ⇒ Undertake daily activities in a safe manner, such as reaching and bending properly, taking time to recover balance when rising from a chair or bed, learning the proper way to fall, and learning how to recover after a fall.
- ⇒ Keep emergency numbers in large print near each phone.
- ⇒ When standing at your sink, practice balance by lifting one foot and holding it off the floor for 10 seconds. Try to hold it longer. Repeat with the other leg.
- ⇒ Put a phone near the floor or on a low side table in case a fall prevents you from coming to a standing or sitting position.
- ⇒ Think about wearing an alarm device that will bring help in case a severe fall prohibits moving or coming to a standing position.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES



National Center for Injury Prevention and Control — [www.cdc.gov/injury](http://www.cdc.gov/injury) or call 800-232-2646  
Colorado State University — [www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/consumer/10242.html](http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/consumer/10242.html)  
Consortium for Adult Wellness — [www.coaw.org/home.aspx](http://www.coaw.org/home.aspx) or call 1-888-900-COAW  
A Matter of Balance Program, National Council on Aging — [www.ncoa.org](http://www.ncoa.org) or call 202-479-1200

## HOME PREVENTION CHECKLIST TO REDUCE FALL HAZARDS

The checklist from the CDC asks about hazards found in each room of your home. For each hazard, the checklist tells you how to fix the problem.

### FLOORS:

1. When you walk through a room, do you have to walk around furniture? Ask someone to move the furniture so your path is clear.
2. Do you have throw rugs on the floor? Remove the rugs or use double-sided tape or a non-slip backing so the rugs won't slip.
3. Are there papers, books, towels, shoes, magazines, boxes, blankets, or other objects on the floor? Always keep objects off the floor.
4. Do you have to walk over or around wires or cords (like lamp, telephone, or extension cords)? Coil or tape cords and wires next to the wall so you won't trip over them. If needed, have an electrician or handyman put in additional outlets.

### STAIRS AND STEPS (both inside and outside your home)

1. Are there papers, shoes, books, or other objects on the stairs? Always keep objects off stairs.
2. Are some steps broken or uneven? Fix loose or uneven steps.
3. Are you missing a light over the stairway? Have an electrician or handyman put in an overhead light at the top and bottom of the stairs.
4. Do you have only one light switch for your stairs (only at the top or at the bottom of the stairs)? Have an electrician or handyman put in a light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs. Get light switches that glow.
5. Has the stairway light bulb burned out? Have a friend or family member change the light bulb.
6. Is the carpet on the steps loose or torn? Make sure the carpet is firmly attached to every step, or remove the carpet and attach nonslip rubber treads to the stairs.
7. Are the handrails loose or broken? Is there a handrail on only one side of the stairs? Fix loose handrails or put in new ones. Make sure handrails are on both sides of the stairs and are as long as the stairs.

### KITCHEN AND EATING AREAS:

1. Are the things you use often on high shelves? Move items in your cabinets. Keep things you use often on the lower shelves (about waist level).
2. Is your step stool unsteady? If you must use a step stool, purchase one with a bar to hold on to when climbing. Never use a chair as a step stool.

### BATHROOMS:

1. Is the tub or shower floor slippery? Put a non-slip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub or shower.
2. Do you need some support when you get in and out of the tub or up from the toilet? Have a carpenter or handyman put grab bars inside the tub and next to the toilet.

### BEDROOMS:

1. Is the light near the bed hard to reach? Place a lamp close to the bed where it's easy to reach.
2. Is the path from your bed to the bathroom dark? Put in a night-light so you can see where you're walking. Some night-lights go on by themselves after dark.

*Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*