



Staying Safe:
A Guide to Preventing Falls
Among Older Adults

Falls among older Americans are common, dangerous, and preventable.

In the U.S., each year **over 14 million adults aged 65 and older—about 1 in 4—experience a fall**, and roughly **3 million of these result in emergency department visits**.

More than 800,000 older adults are **hospitalized** every year because of injuries from falls, which are the most common cause of traumatic brain injury and hip fractures.

While not every fall causes serious injuries, according to 2023 CDC data 41,000 adults over the age of 65 died due to accidental falls.

Preventive actions such as regular balance and strength exercises, checking your medications, and making simple home adjustments, can substantially reduce the risk and consequences of falls.

Neighborhood Falmouth is committed to helping our members age in place with safety and comfort. This booklet offers practical suggestions to support you in that goal—please take a moment to read and consider them. And remember, we're always here to talk through any questions or needs you may have to help keep you safe.

Please visit *NeighborhoodFalmouth.org* for more information on fall prevention.

Your Neighborhood Falmouth Staff



Staying Safe

A Guide to Preventing Falls Among Older Adults

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We gratefully acknowledge the **Woods Hole Foundation** for their generous grant supporting this Falls Prevention Program.



Top Tips to Reduce Fall Risk

- ❑ **Get regular eye exams.** Poor vision greatly increases fall risk. Yearly comprehensive eye exams ensure glasses are up to date and eye diseases like cataracts, glaucoma, or macular degeneration are caught early.
- ❑ **Review medications.** Many prescription and over-the-counter drugs cause dizziness, drowsiness, or low blood pressure. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review medications regularly for side effects and interactions.
- ❑ **Do strength and balance exercises.** Activities such as Tai Chi, yoga, or simple chair exercises improve muscle strength, coordination, and balance. Even short daily walks reduce fall risk significantly.
- ❑ **Get your hearing checked.** Hearing problems can affect both balance and awareness of surroundings. Regular hearing tests and hearing aids, if needed, may prevent disorientation that can lead to falls.
- ❑ **Make your home safer:**
 - Remove clutter, cords, and loose rugs.
 - Add grab bars in the bathroom and railings on stairs.
 - Ensure good lighting in hallways, stairs, and entryways.
 - Keep frequently used items within easy reach.
- ❑ **Wear proper footwear.** Choose shoes with nonslip soles, good support, and closed heels. Avoid slippers without grip and high heels. Indoors, wear sturdy shoes rather than socks or flimsy slippers.
- ❑ **Use assistive devices when needed.** Canes, walkers, or walking poles provide stability and confidence. Get properly fitted devices and use them consistently when recommended.
- ❑ **Stay hydrated and nourished.** Dehydration and poor nutrition can cause weakness, low blood pressure, and dizziness. Eating a balanced diet with adequate protein, calcium, and vitamin D helps keep muscles and bones strong.
- ❑ **Manage chronic conditions.** Conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, and neuropathy can affect balance and movement. Work closely with your healthcare team to manage symptoms and prevent complications.
- ❑ **Have a fall plan.** Even with prevention, falls may still happen. Keep a phone nearby, consider a medical alert device, and talk to family or caregivers about what to do if a fall occurs. Quick access to help reduces complications.



Medication Review Tips

Certain medications can cause dizziness, drowsiness, or low blood pressure—all of which may increase your fall risk.

Here's how to stay safe:

- Review all your medications (including over-the-counter and supplements) with your doctor or pharmacist.
- Ask if any could increase your risk of falling.
- Never stop or change a medication without professional advice.
- Keep a current list of your medications handy.

The Importance of Vision and Hearing Checks

Your eyes and ears are key to maintaining your balance.

Vision: Even minor vision changes can affect depth perception and lead to missteps. Get your eyes checked at least once a year.

Hearing: Inner ear issues can directly impact balance. Schedule regular hearing tests, especially if you've noticed changes and discuss with changes with your primary provider.

Using updated glasses or hearing aids when needed can significantly reduce your fall risk.



Exercises for Balance and Strength

Fall Prevention for Older Adults

Maintaining strength and balance is one of the most effective ways to reduce the risk of falls as we age. Regular practice of simple low-impact exercises can improve mobility, confidence, and independence. Below are examples of safe exercises that older adults can do at home or in a group class such as those at the senior center. Before beginning any exercise regime, please check in with your healthcare professionals.

Strength Exercises

Sit-to-Stand

- Sit in a sturdy chair with feet flat on the floor.
- Cross arms over chest or place hands on thighs.
- Stand up slowly, then sit back down in a controlled motion.

Repeat 10–12 times.

Wall Push-ups

- Stand facing a wall, arms extended at shoulder height.
- Place palms flat on the wall.
- Bend elbows and lean toward the wall, then push back to standing.

Repeat 10–15 times.

Heel Raises

- Stand behind a sturdy chair, holding the back for support.
- Slowly rise onto the balls of your feet, lifting heels off the ground.
- Hold for 2–3 seconds, then lower back down.

Repeat 10–15 times.



Exercises for Balance and Strength

Fall Prevention for Older Adults

Balance Exercises

Heel-to-toe walk

- Place one foot directly in front of the other, heel touching toe.
- Walk 10–20 steps forward in a straight line.

Turn and repeat.

Single-leg stand

- Stand behind a sturdy chair, holding it for balance if needed.
- Lift one foot off the ground and hold for 10 seconds.

Switch legs and repeat 3–5 times.

Side leg raises

- Stand behind a chair, holding for support.
- Slowly lift one leg out to the side, keeping it straight.
- Hold for 2 seconds, then lower.

Repeat 10–12 times on each side.

Tips for Safety and Success

- Always use a sturdy chair or wall for support when needed.
- Start slowly and build up repetitions over time.
- Wear supportive shoes with non-slip soles.
- Consider joining a **tai chi** or **gentle yoga** class for guided practice.
- Stay hydrated and listen to your body.
- Watch online videos about falls prevention and balance.

By incorporating these exercises into a daily or weekly routine, older adults can strengthen their muscles, improve their balance, and significantly lower their risk of falls while maintaining an active and independent lifestyle.



FACT SHEET

Feet and Footwear for Older Adults

Footcare and safe shoes can prevent falls

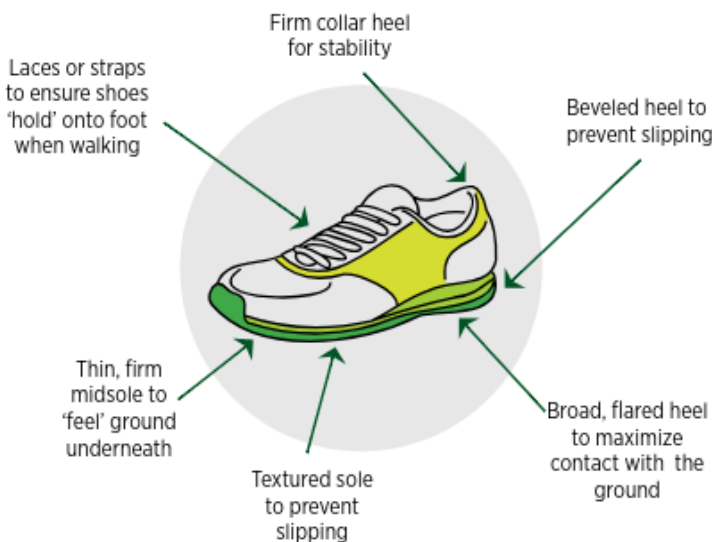
Falls are the leading cause of injury for older adults (ages 65 and older) and can have serious consequences, like limited mobility and loss of independence. Routine care for feet and proper supportive footwear can reduce your risk of falls.

What foot problems are associated with falls?

Foot related risk factors that increase fall risk:

- ▶ Increased foot pain
- ▶ Reduced flexibility in ankle joint
- ▶ Reduced calf muscle strength (the muscle that helps you rise on the balls of your feet)
- ▶ Reduced sensation resulting from neuropathy (nerve damage)
- ▶ Presence of a bunion (hallux valgus deformity) or toe deformities

What makes a shoe safe?



Footwear Tips

Health Tips

- Your healthcare provider or podiatrist can check your feet and determine if there are issues that increase your risk of falling. Podiatrists diagnose and treat foot conditions.
- Ask your healthcare provider to check your feet once a year.
- See a podiatrist if you have foot problems, such as toe or foot deformities or foot pain.
- Work with a physical therapist to learn exercises to increase strength and flexibility of foot and ankle.

Safety Tips

- Always wear properly fitted shoes inside and outside your home.
- Wear sturdy shoes with low heels, traction, and strong arch and heel support.

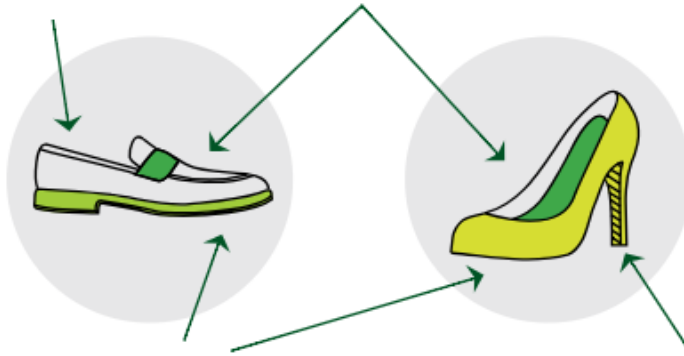
Working with your healthcare provider or podiatrist to address foot problems and using appropriate footwear can reduce your risk of falling.

Footwear Tips

What makes a shoe unsafe?

Soft or stretched uppers allow the foot to slide around in the sole

Lack of laces means the foot can slide out of the shoe



Slippery or worn soles are a balance hazard, particularly in wet weather

Avoid high heels (more than 1 inch), especially ones with narrow heels

Examples of appropriate shoes to reduce risk of falls



Safety Tips

- Avoid walking in only socks inside and outside your home.
- Avoid wearing shoes with heels over one inch, with no ankle support, or with a smooth sole.
- Avoid wearing shoes with no back (such as a mule or clog) or strappy back (such as a slingback).

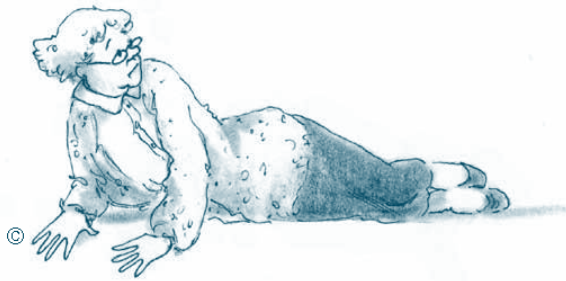
Footwear Tips

- Shop for shoes later in the day to ensure a proper fit.
- Have your feet measured to ensure appropriate shoe width and length.
- Accommodate foot deformities such as bunions or hammertoes by choosing shoes with a wide toe box.
- Consider a pedorthist, a specialist in footwear and devices, for footwear and orthotic recommendations to provide the best possible support for walking. See www.pedorthics.org for a searchable directory of credentialed pedorthists.

What to do after a *fall*... if you **CAN** get up

The first thing to do is to catch your breath. Check and see if you are injured. Even if you think you're OK, take your time before getting up again.

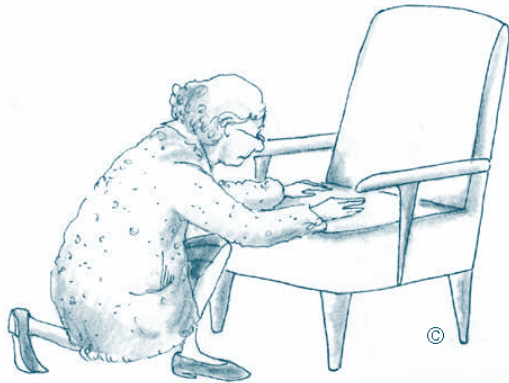
Follow these five steps for getting up:



1 Lie on your side; bend the leg that is on top and lift yourself onto your elbows or hands.



2 Pull yourself toward an armchair or other sturdy object, then kneel while placing both hands on the chair or object.



3 Place your stronger leg in front, holding on to the chair or object.



4 Stand up.

5 Very carefully, turn and sit down.



Most of all,
stay calm.

“ Practice these steps often and be prepared in case you fall. ”

What to do after a *fall*...

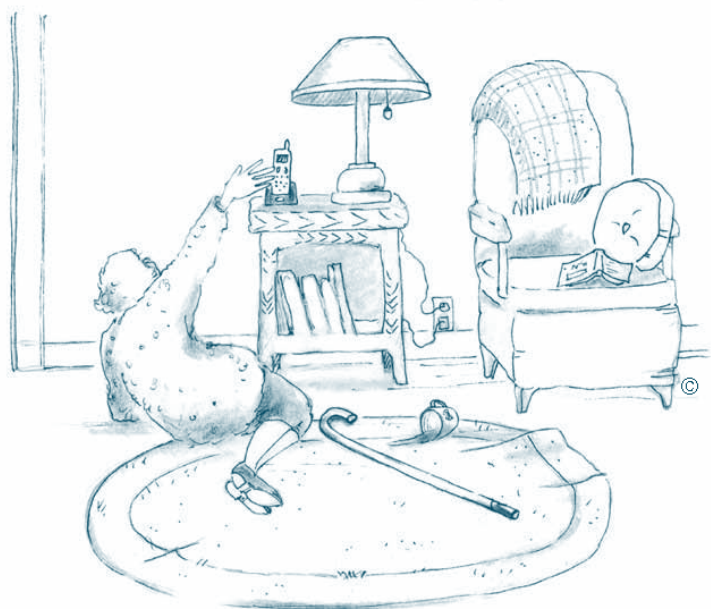
if you **CANNOT** get up

If you feel any discomfort or are unable to get up, try to get help.

1 Call out for help if you think you can be heard.

2 If you have an emergency call device or telephone at hand, use it.

3 If you don't, try to slide yourself towards a telephone or a place where you will be heard.



4 Make noise with your cane or another object to attract attention.

5 Wait for help in the most comfortable position for you.



6 If you can, place a pillow under your head and cover yourself with a piece of clothing or a blanket to stay warm.

7 Try to move your joints to ease circulation and prevent stiffness.

Home Modification Loan Program

Did you know there is a no-interest loan program to help you with some types of home modifications to help you remain at home?

The Home Modification Loan Program (HMLP) is a state-funded loan program that provides financing to homeowners and small landlords for accessibility renovations to keep a household member with a disability or an older adult in their own home and community.

This is not a home repair program.

Projects funded by HMLP include ramps and lifts, bathroom and kitchen adaptations, sensory integration spaces, fencing, and accessory dwelling units.

Loan Details:

- \$1,000 to \$50,000 loans to property owners
- 0% interest loan
- No monthly payments
- Repayment is required when the property is sold or transferred

To find out if you qualify, go to: <https://cedac.org/find-out-if-you-qualify/>

For more information, call Kimberley Yau at 508-326-5349 or email her at hmlp@smoc.org.

There is an extensive application process. Neighborhood Falmouth can help you find out if you qualify and, if so, can help with the application.



Online Resources

Recommended by Neighborhood Falmouth

Websites ending in .edu, .org, or .gov are often more trustworthy than commercial (.com) sites; they are less likely to be influenced by profit motives.

Start your search using **MedlinePlus**. A highly reliable government health site, MedlinePlus (<https://medlineplus.gov>) is a service of the National Library of Medicine. If you are concerned about internet disinformation, many excellent sites that have been developed by universities, health systems and foundations, including those listed here.

General Health Information

Family Doctor: Medical advice from the American Academy of Family Physicians; includes information about prevention and wellness, plus a symptom checker (<https://familydoctor.org>)

Mayo Clinic: Health Library (www.mayoclinic.org)

Cleveland Clinic: Health Library (<https://my.clevelandclinic.org>)

Merck Manual Consumer Version: Highly respected manual for professionals and consumers that contains general medical information about thousands of diseases and symptoms in all fields of medicine (www.merckmanuals.com)

Harvard Health Publishing: The consumer health information division of Harvard Medical School; clinically accurate content in easy-to-understand language (www.health.harvard.edu)

Older Adults Health Information

Aging Well: Resources, tools, and best practices for older adults from the National Council on Aging (www.ncoa.org)

HealthInAging: Expert health information for older adults and caretakers from the American Geriatrics Society (www.healthinaging.org)

Later in Life Planning: Information from Neighborhood Falmouth including details about Advance Care Preparations, Losing a Loved One, Funeral Planning and Defining Your Legacy (www.neighborhoodfalmouth.org/late-in-life-planning-1)

National Resource Center on LGBTQ+ Aging: Focus on improving the quality of services and supports offered to lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender older adults, their families and caregivers. (<https://lgbtagingcenter.org>)



Mental Health

American Psychiatric Association: Information for patients and families (www.psychiatry.org/patients-families)

NAMI: Provides information on warning signs and symptoms, treatments, and coping with mental illness in a family from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.nami.org/about-mental-illness)

HelpGuide: Independent nonprofit that develops information about mental health issues and wellness in collaboration with Harvard Health (www.helpguide.org)

Cancer

National Comprehensive Cancer Network: Guidelines for Patients and other free cancer resources. More than 70 free books that help people with cancer talk with their doctors about the best treatment options for their disease. (www.nccn.org/patientresources/patient-resources)

American Cancer Society: Get information on a variety of cancer topics, including help with understanding your cancer diagnosis and finding and paying for treatment. (www.cancer.org)

CancerCare: Provides free professional support services including counseling, support groups, educational workshops, publications, and financial assistance to anyone affected by cancer (www.cancercare.org)

Specific Disease Resources

Alzheimer's and Dementia: Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org)

Arthritis and Joint Replacement: American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (www.orthoinfo.org)

COPD: American Lung Association (www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/copd)

Diabetes: American Diabetes Association (<https://diabetes.org>)

Diets/Weight Loss: Harvard Health Publishing (www.health.harvard.edu/topics/diet-and-weight-loss)

Drug & Alcohol Issues: Partnership to End Addiction (<https://drugfree.org>)

Eye and Vision Conditions: American Optometric Association (www.aoa.org/healthy-eyes/eye-and-vision-conditions)

Falls: Prevention for Older Adults (www.healthinaging.org/a-z-topic/fall-prevention)

Hearing Loss: Basic Facts & Information (www.healthinaging.org/a-z-topic/hearing-loss)

Heart Disease: CardioSmart American College of Cardiology (www.cardiosmart.org) and American Heart Association (www.heart.org)

Medical Alert Systems: The Best Medical Alert Systems for 2025 (www.medicalalert.org/best-medical-alert-systems)

Nutrition: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (www.eatright.org)

Osteoporosis: Bone Health-Osteoporosis Foundation (www.bonehealthandosteoporosis.org/patients)

Urology Conditions: American Urological Association (www.urologyhealth.org/urology-a-z)



LGBTQ+ Resources

GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality (<https://glma.org>)

Human Rights Campaign (www.hrc.org)

American Academy of Family Practice LGBTQ+ Health Toolkit (www.aafp.org/family-physician/patient-care/care-resources/lbgtq.html)

Johns Hopkins LGBTQ Health (www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/lgbtq-health)

The Trevor Project (www.thetrevorproject.org)

Health News

The following online publications are reliable sources for accurate and timely news about health issues:

Kaiser Family Foundation Health News (<https://kffhealthnews.org/>)

Knowable Magazine (<https://knowablemagazine.org/>)

Medical News Today (www.medicalnewstoday.com)

NPR Health-Shots (www.npr.org/sections/health-shots)

New York Times Well (www.nytimes.com/section/well)





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Falls Prevention Checklist

Use this checklist to find and fix hazards in your home

Stairs & Steps (Indoors & Outdoors)

Are there papers, shoes, books, or other objects on the stairs?

- Always keep objects off the stairs.

Are some steps broken or uneven?

- Fix loose or uneven steps.

Is there a light and light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs?

- Have an electrician put in an overhead light and light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs. You can get light switches that glow.

Has a stairway light bulb burned out?

- Have a friend, family member, or Neighborhood Falmouth volunteer change the light bulb.

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 non-slip rubber treads to the stairs.

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

Are the things you use often on high shelves?

- Keep things you use often on the lower shelves (about waist high).

Is your step stool sturdy?

- If you must use a step stool, get one with a bar to hold on to. Never use a chair as a step stool.



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