

Falls and Older Adults

This handout is about falls in older adults. Falls can happen for many reasons and it is important to be aware of your risk.

Risk Increases with Age

Many people have a friend or relative who has fallen or have fallen themselves. If you or someone you know has fallen, you are not alone. More than 1 in 4 people age 65 years or older fall each year and the risk of falling and fall-related injury increases with age.

Check Your Risk for Falling

Please circle “Yes” or “No” for each statement below.		
Yes (2)	No	I have fallen in the past year.
Yes (2)	No	I use or have been told to use a cane or walker to get around safely.
Yes (1)	No	Sometimes I feel unsteady when I am walking.
Yes (1)	No	I steady myself by holding onto furniture when walking at home.
Yes (1)	No	I am worried about falling.
Yes (1)	No	I need to push with my hands to stand up from a chair.
Yes (1)	No	I have some trouble stepping up onto a curb.
Yes (1)	No	I often have to rush to the toilet.
Yes (1)	No	I have lost some feeling in my feet.
Yes (1)	No	I take medicine that sometimes makes me feel light-headed or more tired than usual.
Yes (1)	No	I take medicine to help me sleep or improve my mood.
Yes (1)	No	I often feel sad or depressed.
Total _____	Add up the number of points for each “yes” answer. If you scored 4 points or more, you may be at risk for falling. Discuss this checklist with your doctor.	

If you said “Yes” to any of the above, please keep reading for facts about falls and why they matter.

Things to Think About	Why It Matters/Facts About Falls
I have fallen in the past year.	People who have fallen once are likely to fall again.
I use or have been advised to use a cane or walker to get around safely.	People who have been advised to use a cane or walker may already be more likely to fall.
Sometimes I feel unsteady when I am walking.	Unsteadiness or needing support while walking are signs of poor balance.
I steady myself by holding onto furniture when walking at home.	This is also a sign of poor balance.
I am worried about falling.	People who are worried about falling are more likely to fall.
I need to push with my hands to stand up from a chair.	This is a sign of weak leg muscles, a major reason for falling.
I have some trouble stepping up onto a curb.	This is also a sign of weak leg muscles.
I often have to rush to the toilet.	Rushing to the bathroom, especially at night, increases your chance of falling.
I have lost some feeling in my feet.	Numbness in your feet can cause stumbles and lead to falls.
I take medicine that sometimes makes me feel light-headed or more tired than usual.	Side effects from medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.
I take medicine to help me sleep or improve my mood.	These medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.
I often feel sad or depressed.	Symptoms of depression, such as not feeling well or feeling slowed down, are linked to falls.

Falls Lead to Injury

Each year, more than 3 million older U.S. adults go to emergency rooms for injuries from falls. Falls are the number one cause of broken bones, hospital stays, loss of independence and death from injury for people age 65 and older.

Hip fractures are one of the most serious injuries from falling. They are a leading cause of death, disability and loss of independence among older adults. It is hard to recover from a hip fracture. Many people are not able to live on their own. Some people need long-term care even after treatment and rehab.

Fear of Falling

Many older adults are afraid of falling. This fear becomes more common as people age, even for those who have not fallen. It may lead older people to avoid activities like walking, shopping or taking part in social events. If you are worried about falling, talk with your health care team. You may be referred to a physical therapist (PT).

A PT can show you how to help your balance, strengthen your muscles, improve your walking and build your walking confidence. Getting rid of your fear of falling can help you to stay active, healthy and prevent future falls.

Tell Your Health Care Team If You Fall

We want to help you feel more confident in your abilities. If you fall, be sure to talk about the fall at your next visit with your health care team, even if you are not hurt. Falls do not “just happen,” and people do not fall just because they get older. Many causes of falls can be treated or fixed. You and your doctor can talk about how to prevent future falls.

Falls can be a sign of a new medical problem, such as diabetes. Falls could be a sign of a drop in your blood pressure when you stand up. Falls could also be a sign of problems with your medicine or eyesight. After a fall, your doctor may suggest changes in your medicines or your eyewear prescription, physical therapy or use of a walking aid.

Ways to Prevent Falls

Exercise will help improve your balance and strengthen your muscles. Not wearing bifocals or multifocal glasses when you walk, especially on stairs, will make you less likely to fall. You can also make your home safer by removing loose rugs, adding handrails to stairs and hallways, and making sure you have good lighting in dark areas.

Falls are not a normal part of life, even as a person gets older. You can take action to prevent falls. Your health care team can help you decide what changes will help.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2019. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6625