

# Falls prevention

At least one-third of people aged 65 years and over fall one or more times a year.

Although many falls do not result in injury, they can cause a fear of falling that can result in loss of confidence and restriction of activities.

## What causes people to fall?

There are a number of factors that contribute to our risk of falling as we grow older, including:

- Weakening muscles and stiffening joints
- Side effects from medication – especially if you are taking five or more medications
- Sensory and balance problems
- Not doing enough physical activity
- Poor diet and not drinking enough water
- Sore feet or unsafe shoes
- Trip hazards like rugs or floor mats, uneven surfaces and poor lighting at home or outside
- Short-term illnesses such as the flu or infection, or recovering from surgery



### Tip

If you're feeling unsteady or have a fall, even one that does not cause an injury, you should discuss this with your doctor. Falls can be an indicator of an underlying health problem.

## To reduce your risk of falls:

- Talk to your doctor or other health professional about managing your **medications**, and ways to manage chronic medical conditions, (including dizziness and incontinence)
- Take steps to **improve safety** in and around your home
- Have your **eyes tested** annually
- Visit your **podiatrist** regularly to minimise foot problems
- Wear **shoes** that are comfortable and fit well – they should be wide enough in the toe area, have low or no heels and have slip-resistant soles
- Make sure your **vitamin D** levels are maintained for strong bones and muscles
- Eat a **healthy diet** and drink plenty of fluids
- **Get active.** Exercise at all ages is beneficial

## Physical activity

The more active we are, the better our chance of keeping our muscles strong and our joints flexible.

To avoid falls and injuries from falls, continue with the exercises in this program to maintain your balance, strength and flexibility.

You can also search for group exercise programs in your local area on the NSW Active and Healthy website: [www.activeandhealthy.nsw.gov.au](http://www.activeandhealthy.nsw.gov.au).



# Falls prevention

## To improve safety in and around your home:

- Have good **lighting**, especially between the bedroom and the bathroom at night and near any internal steps/stairs
- **Remove clutter** and make sure walkways and corridors are kept clear and well lit
- Check that **mats and rugs** are secure and have no tears or wrinkles. Put adhesive strips on all mats and rugs or remove them
- Install **grab rails** in the bathroom (towel rails are not strong enough to use as grab rails)
- Install **support rails** near steps if there is no hand rail
- Mark the leading edge of outside **steps** (for example, with white paint) so they are easy to see
- Repair broken, uneven or **cracked paths**, patios and other walking surfaces. Report cracked footpaths to your local council

### ★ Tip

Ask an occupational therapist about ways to make your home safer.



## Medication management

Medications come in many forms including tablets, capsules, skin patches, liquids, eye drops, sprays, inhalers, creams, suppositories and injections.

Some medications, both prescription medications and those bought without prescription, can make you dizzy or drowsy. This can increase your risk of having a fall.

Falls are more likely when taking medication for:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Sleeping difficulties

Talk to your doctor about your current medications and whether there are any that could be discontinued.

### ★ Tip

Make a list of every medicine you take, and take it with you when you go to see a doctor or pharmacist. This list should include any herbs, tablets or supplements you buy from a health food store or from the health food section of the supermarket, as well as any medicines you buy from a pharmacy.

### Medication List

#### What you need

- ✓ Name of medication
- ✓ Dose
- ✓ How much
- ✓ How often and when
- ✓ Why I take it
- ✓ Allergies

# What to do if you fall at home

## It is important to have an emergency plan:

- Know who to call for help – you could keep a list of the phone numbers of family or friends near the phone, or save them into your phone for quick access using one-touch dialling or save them into your favourites list.
- Have a phone within reach on a low table, in case it is hard to get up.
- Protect yourself by considering whether you want a device that raises an alarm in case of emergency.
- Let trusted family and friends know how to get into your house if you can't let them in.



## If you have a fall at home:

1. Don't panic – stay still for a few minutes and try to stay calm.
2. Decide whether you can get up yourself.
3. If you cannot get up, call for help. **Dial triple zero (000)** for emergency services.

## If you can get up by yourself:

1. Roll onto your side and try to get into a crawling position.
2. Crawl to a stable piece of furniture, like a lounge chair.
3. Get up onto your knees.
4. Push up, using your strongest leg and arms, still firmly holding onto the furniture.
5. Sit down on the furniture.

## If you can't get up by yourself:

1. Try to crawl or drag yourself to somewhere on carpet and find anything that can keep you warm, such as bedclothes, a towel or clothing, while you wait for help.
2. Use your personal alarm, if you have one.
3. If you don't have a personal alarm, use an object that you can bang to make a loud noise, like a walking stick, against the wall to alert a neighbour.
4. If you know no one will hear you, keep warm and try to get up again later.

### ☆ Important

If you have a fall, see your doctor to check for injuries and to assess whether there was a medical cause for the fall.



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# My plan if I should fall

Make an action plan for getting help after a fall or other emergency.

## How will anyone know I need help?

For example: will I use a personal alarm or other device, or arrange for a friend to call at a set time each day?

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## Who will I contact in the event of an emergency?

Name	Contact Details
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## How will they get in to the house to help me?

For example: will I leave a spare key with a trusted neighbour or in a safe place outside the house?

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## Things to do:

For example: save key numbers on speed dial.

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