

## Who is at risk of falling?

Anyone can fall, although the risk is higher in older people. Each year, falls occur in about a third of people 75 years of age or older who are living in their homes. This increased risk of falling may be the result of changes that come with aging plus other medical conditions, such as arthritis, cataracts or hip surgery.

## What can I do to lower my risk of falling?

Because most falls (75%) occur in the home, you can make sure your home is safe by following these tips:

- Make sure that you have good lighting in your home. As your eyes age, less light reaches the back of the eyes where your vision is located. The lighting in your home must be bright so you can avoid tripping over objects that are not easy to see. You should put night lights in your bedroom, hall and bathroom.
- Rugs should be firmly fastened to the floor or have nonskid backing. Loose ends should be tacked down.
- Electrical cords should not be lying on the floor in walking areas.
- Put hand rails in your bathroom for bath, shower and toilet use.
- Don't use stairs without rails on both sides for support. Be sure stairs are well lit.
- In the kitchen, make sure items are within easy reach. Don't store things too high or too low. Then you won't have to use a stepladder or a stool to reach them.
- Wear shoes with firm nonskid, non-friction soles. Avoid wearing loose-fitting slippers that could cause you to trip.

## What else can I do?

Take good care of your body. Try to stay healthy by following these tips:

- See your eye doctor once a year. Cataracts and other eye diseases can cause you to fall if you don't see well.
- Exercise regularly to keep your bones and muscles strong.
- Take good care of your feet. If you have pain in your feet or if you have large, thick nails and corns, you should have your doctor look at your feet.
- Talk to your doctor about any side effects you may have with your medicines. Problems caused by side effects from medicine are a common cause of falls. The more medicines you take, the more you risk having side effects from them, which raises your risk of falling.
- See your doctor if you have dizzy spells.
- If your doctor suggests that you use a cane or a walker to help you walk, please use it. This will give you extra stability when walking and will help you avoid a bad fall.
- Don't smoke.
- Limit alcohol to two drinks per day.
- When you get out of bed in the morning or at night to use the bathroom, sit on the side of the bed for a few minutes before standing up. Your blood pressure takes some time to adjust when you sit up. It may be too low if you get up quickly. This can make you dizzy, and you might lose your balance and fall.

(Created 9/00 Updated 7/01)

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

Visit [familydoctor.org](http://familydoctor.org) for information on this and many other health-related topics.

Copyright © 2001 by the American Academy of Family Physicians.

Permission is granted to print and photocopy this material for nonprofit educational uses. Written permission is required for all other uses, including electronic uses.

For further information, please contact the  
Greater Omaha Chapter of the National Safety Council at 402-896-0454.



# FALLS: *How to Lower Your Risk*