



FALL PREVENTION

As we get into the winter season, we need to be especially careful about preventing falls.

Each year, 1 in 4 adults age 65+ has a fall every year. Falls are the leading cause of fatal and non-fatal injuries for older Americans. 20-30% of people who fall have an injury that can reduce mobility and may threaten independence. More patients go to the emergency room in the US after falling than from any other mishap. Falls are costly—in dollars and quality of life.

Falls can happen anywhere. The most common are the places you are every day: shower stalls, supermarket aisles, stairs.

Know the signs that indicate a higher fall risk:

- Lower body weakness
- Shuffling gait
- Holding onto furniture to prevent falling
- Dizziness when standing up
- Decrease in coordination
- Decrease in ability to walk up steps
- Need for mobility assistance (walker, cane, wheelchair)
- Failure to use prescription glasses or mobility assistance
- Increase in confusion
- Frequent bathroom trips, especially at night

Watch also for environmental risk factors such as poor lighting, throw rugs, pets, and other tripping hazards. Also make sure your medications aren't making you dizzy, don't rush, make sure you can see where you are stepping, and remember to take a minute before you stand up after lying down.

Winter weather increase risk thanks to ice and snow. Often it is best to stay inside until the sun and Snow Melt do their job. Remember that even if your walk is clear, it may not be so great at your destination. Be especially wary of black ice that looks wet but is slick, and think twice before clambering over snow piles. Make sure you have your emergency alert or cell phone with you, even for a short walk to pick up the paper.

The National Council on Aging recommends these steps toward fall prevention:

- Enroll in a good balance and exercise program (at PSRC!);
- Ask your health care provider for a fall risk assessment;
- Regularly review your medications with your doctor or pharmacist;
- Get your vision and hearing checked annually and update your eyeglasses;
- Keep your home safe;
- Talk to family members to get their help taking simple steps to stay safe.

Much of the focus of attention has been on fall prevention through balance and strength training. Some scientists are now teaching people to learn how to fall to minimize injury, taking the view that falls are an inevitability to be prepared for. They are demonstrating “safe landing responses” that include protecting your head, and learning how to roll onto the fleshy side parts of the body rather than straight forward or back, breaking arms or hips. They also say that falling often causes a fear of falling, leading to abnormal walking which actually increases risk. Physical therapists may be able to help you learn these tips.

Implementing these recommendations can help you keep your life fall-free.

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