

Published on *SeniorNavigator* (<https://seniornavigator.org>)

Balance: Fall Prevention

Approximately one-third of older people fall every year. Half of these individuals experience multiple falls. While, often, the fall is inconsequential, falls are a serious concern for older people, as they can lead to hospitalization, reduced mobility and even death.

There are many things you can do to help lessen the chance of falling, especially in your home, which is where 75% of falls occur.

Take the following steps **NOW**:

- Wear shoes that fit comfortably and securely. Avoid shoes with thick soles.
- Have regular eye exams.
- Improve the lighting levels inside and outside your home.
- Evaluate your home for safety hazards - scatter rugs, electrical wires across the floor, furniture placement - and make changes as needed.
- Participate regularly in yoga, Tai Chi or other exercises to help your balance.
- If appropriate, learn how to properly use an assistive device - cane, walker, walking stick - and then USE it!
- Increase your calcium intake and ask your doctor about evaluating and treating your osteoporosis risk.
- If you have diabetes, inspect your feet daily. Use night-lights in the bedroom, hall, and bathroom.
- Consider using raised toilet seats, grab bars, and non-slip decals or tub mats in the bathroom.
- Keep small objects off the floor.
- Reduce glare by using frosted bulbs, indirect lighting, shades or globes on light fixtures, or partially closing curtains or blinds.
- Rails by the tub and the stairs provide something to grab when you need it.
- Remember it's easier to get up from high firm chairs than from low soft ones.
- Watch out for sidewalk cracks, holes, and curbs when walking outside.
- Take special care if using sedatives and avoid mixing them with alcohol.

Be sure to work closely with your physician to assess any health conditions or medications that may affect your likelihood of falling. Your physician may recommend a balance assessment, physical therapy, medication adjustments, or other interventions as appropriate.

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Article Source

Carilion Clinic

Source URL

<https://www.carilionclinic.org>

Last Reviewed

Friday, August 26, 2022