



Preventing Falls

Falls are the most common accidents among older people and can cause injuries affecting lifestyle and independence. Older people often have medical conditions or take medicines that increase their risk of having a fall. The chances of having a fall can be reduced by knowing and limiting the potential causes.

Many different things can increase the chances of having a fall.

Medicines

With increasing age, people often become more sensitive to the actions and adverse effects of medicines – including medicines that can increase the risks of having a fall. Side effects of medicines that can increase the chances of having a fall include drowsiness, dizziness, blurred vision and confusion.

The medicines most often associated with an increased risk of falls are those commonly used to treat:

- Sleep problems
- Fluid retention
- Eye conditions
- Pain
- Anxiety, depression
- High blood pressure
- Angina and other heart diseases
- Brain and nervous system diseases.

Important

To reduce the chances of having a fall:

- Understand the effects of your medicines
- Move slowly – don't rush
- Exercise regularly
- Wear supportive shoes
- Keep your home environment safe
- Ask for help if you feel unsteady
- Limit alcohol intake.

Medical Conditions

Falls may be a sign of a medical condition. After a fall, ask a doctor to check for injuries and to investigate possible causes of the fall.

Medical conditions that can increase the chances of having a fall include:

- Low blood pressure
- Stroke
- Parkinson's disease
- Arthritis
- Meniere's disease
- Diabetes
- Dementia
- Depression
- Incontinence (poor bladder or bowel control)
- Poor nutrition.

Age-related changes

Age-related physical changes can increase the chances of having a fall. Impaired vision, poor balance, weak muscles, stiff joints and slow reflexes can all cause people to be unsteady on their feet and unable to protect themselves from falling. Many older people need to get to the toilet quickly and frequently, because of changes in bladder and bowel function and this can add to their chances of falling.

Environmental hazards

Poorly designed or poorly maintained homes and buildings, inappropriate footwear and the time of day can all add to the chances of having a fall. Potential hazards include:

- Footwear that does not give enough grip or support, or footwear that sticks
- Loose or worn mats
- Uneven paving or walkways
- Slippery floors and surfaces (e.g., bathroom floors, mossy paths)
- No handrails for stairs or toilets
- Poor lighting
- Clutter
- Evening and night time – more falls happen due to tiredness and poor light
- Pets.

Self care

Preventing falls

- Exercise at a moderate level for at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week.

A physiotherapist or fitness instructor can advise on exercises for flexibility, balance and muscle strength. A physiotherapist can also advise on walking aids.

- Ask an occupational therapist for advice on how to make your home safer.
- Ask a podiatrist for advice on footwear that provides good support and balance.
- Stand up slowly after lying down or sitting. Take care when bending down and make sure you are steady before walking.
- Ask someone for assistance if you feel unstable.
- Have your eyesight checked regularly.
- Limit your alcohol intake.
- Make a plan of what to do in the event of a fall or other emergency. Consider a personal monitoring or alarm system.

Care with Medicines

- Keep a record of all your medical conditions and all your medicines, including non-prescription medicines which have been purchased at pharmacies, supermarkets and health food shops. This will help your doctor and pharmacist to recommend medicines that will not increase your risk of falling. A MediList record card is available from your pharmacist or on the DVA website.
- Read the labels on all medicines you take. Check with your pharmacist whenever your medicines have the following labels:

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

This medicine may cause dizziness especially when you stand up quickly. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.

This medicine may affect mental alertness and/or coordination. If affected, do not drive a motor vehicle or operate machinery.

This medicine may cause drowsiness and may increase the effects of alcohol. If affected, do not drive a motor vehicle or operate machinery.

- Ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice on how to reduce or avoid adverse effects of your medicines.
- Ask a pharmacist or doctor before drinking alcohol while taking medicines.
- Do not use other people's medicine. It could have a different effect on you.
- Start taking new medicines when other people are around to help in the event of an adverse effect.

Related fact cards

- Arthritis
- Bladder & Urine Control
- Exercises for Flexibility
- Medicines & Driving (website only, ask your pharmacist)
- Osteoporosis
- Sleeping Problems
- Vision Impairment
- Wise Use of Medicines

For more information

A doctor – listed under 'Medical Practitioners' in the yellow pages of the phone book.

A physiotherapist, occupational therapist and/or a podiatrist – contact your nearest public hospital or Community Health Centre, or look in the yellow pages of the phone book.

The Aged and Community Care Information Line – phone 1800 500 853 or website www.health.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacy Self Care Support – phone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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