

Fall Prevention Awareness Month

Six Easy Steps to Prevent Falls



1. FIND A BALANCE OR EXERCISE PROGRAM

AGING & INDEPENDENCE SERVICES



Physical activity is one of the most important ways to lower your chances of falling. It keeps you strong and has many mental health benefits. Exercises that improve balance and coordination (like Tai Chi) are most helpful. Being physically inactive leads to weakness and increases your chances of falling. Ask your doctor or health care provider about the best type of physical activity program for you.



Resources

Performing exercises that improve strength and balance is the single most important activity that adults can do to stay active and reduce their fall risk. The following resources can improve your fitness and inspire you to be more active.

Feeling Fit Club

The Feeling Fit Club is a functional fitness program that includes four components (strength, balance, aerobic endurance, and flexibility) and encourages social interaction. Classes are available online and in-person at host sites around San Diego County. To learn more, visit HealthierLivingSD.org or call (858) 495-5500. You can also request a free DVD and stretch band!

Tai Chi Moving for Better Balance

Tai Chi Moving for Better Balance is a research-based balance training regimen designed for older adults at risk of falling and people with balance disorders. Classes are available in-person at host sites around San Diego County. To learn more, visit HealthierLivingSD.org or call (858) 495-5500.

San Diego College of Continuing Education

The Emeritus Program challenges adults to stay socially engaged and physically fit through a variety of courses that meet the diverse needs of an aging population. Classes address health and wellness, nutrition, and other important topics. Instruction is designed for adults 55+ years. To learn more, visit sdce.edu/emeritus or call (619) 388-4956.

San Diego Oasis

San Diego Oasis offers unique educational programs for adults 50+ who want to continue to learn and be productive throughout life. Membership is free and open to anyone 50 or older. Health and fitness classes and workshops are available online and at their two locations. To learn more, please visit san-diego.oasisnet.org or call (619) 881-6262 (La Mesa) or (760) 796-6020 (Escondido).

SilverSneakers

Work out with people near you, online or in-person! Available at no cost for adults 65+ through select Medicare plans. To learn more, visit tools.silversneakers.com or call (866) 584-7389.

Go4Life

Go4Life® encourages older adults to reap health benefits by making physical activity part of their daily lives. The interactive website provides health information for individuals, health care professionals, and organizations; sample exercises; motivational tips; tracking tools; nutrition information; free materials to help older people start exercising and keep going; and virtual coaches to help motivate participants. To learn more, visit go4life.nia.nih.gov.

Other Information & Tips

National Physical Activity Guidelines recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a week. Stay active and maintain gains in strength, balance, and flexibility that reduce fall risk. Here are some tips to help you stay fit and active!



- 1. Listen to your body.** Always warm up before exercising and cool down afterward. Gauge your level of effort with the “talk test”. You should be exercising at a level that allows you to talk, but not sing.
- 2. Identify ways to move more and sit less during the day.** For example, get up during every commercial on TV and do an active chore or march in place. If possible, taking a walk outside is a great way to stay active and enjoy the benefits of fresh air and sunshine.
- 3. Practice all 4 types of exercise for the most benefits.** Vary your routine to include endurance, strength, balance, and flexibility exercises.
- 4. Be aware of your environment. Be mindful as you walk through your home.** Look out for hand rails or other objects that can help support you if you start to lose your balance.
- 5. Hydrate.** Drink water before, during, and after exercising, even if you don’t feel thirsty.

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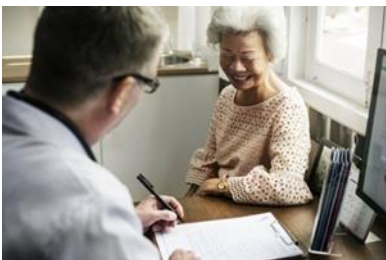


2. TELL YOUR DOCTOR IF YOU'VE HAD A FALL OR ARE AFRAID OF FALLING

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More than one out of every four older adults experience a fall each year, but less than half tell their doctor. Falling once nearly doubles your chances of falling again. Many people who fall, even if it does not result in injury, become afraid of falling. This fear may cause a person to refrain from everyday activities. When a person is less active, they become weaker, which increases their risk of falling. Ask your doctor or healthcare provider to evaluate your risk of falling and talk with them about specific actions you can take to prevent falls.



Resources

The below resources include fall prevention classes, as well as tips that can help you start a conversation with your doctor about falls, a tool to assess your current fall risk, and helpful information to help you conquer fears about falling.

A Matter of Balance

A Matter of Balance is an evidence-based program specifically designed to reduce the fear of falling and improve activity levels among older adults. The program includes eight two-hour classes presented to a small group of 8-12 participants led by trained coaches. The program enables participants to reduce the fear of falling by learning to view falls as controllable, setting goals for increasing activity levels, making small changes to reduce fall risks at home, and exercising to increase strength and balance. To learn more, please e-mail Colburn-Hargis.Paige@scrippshealth.org.

Chronic Disease Self-Management Program

The Chronic Disease Self-Management Program (Healthier Living with Chronic Conditions) is an evidence-based program that was originally developed by Stanford University and is now managed by the Self-Management Resource Center. This program is designed for people with chronic conditions, as well as their family members and caregivers. The program is led by two trained peer educators, who may also have a chronic condition. During the workshop, participants learn fall prevention strategies, as well as tips on how to communicate effectively with their healthcare team, among other topics. To learn more, please visit HealthierLivingSD.org or e-mail HealthierLiving.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov.

Talk With Your Doc About Falls Handout

The Fall Prevention Center of Excellence developed a 2-page handout on how to start the conversation with your doctor about falls, including questions to ask your doctor. To access this handout, please click [here](#).

National Council on Aging's Falls Free Check-Up Tool

Check to see if you're at risk of falling with NCOA's Falls Free CheckUp tool. Once you complete the assessment, you will receive a copy of your Falls Free CheckUp Report which you can share and discuss with your doctor and family. To access the tool, please click [here](#).

Cleveland Clinic

Do you worry about falling? The Cleveland Clinic has some tips on how to conquer this fear. To access the article, please click [here](#).

Other Information & Tips

Fall prevention is a team effort! Your healthcare provider can help you find ways to maintain your mobility for as long as possible to help reduce your risk. Here are some tips for making the most out of your next visit:



- 1. Speak up.** Don't be afraid to tell your healthcare provider if you have had a fall or if you are afraid of falling. Report any falls, even if they did not result in injury.
- 2. Document your fall.** If you do experience a fall, write down what happened before, during, and after the fall. What were you doing? How did you feel? Were you injured? Report your answers to these questions to your healthcare provider.
- 3. Ask questions.** Our time with our healthcare providers is limited, so it's beneficial to have some questions prepared to help guide the discussion. How can my current health affect my risk of falling? Would I benefit from receiving a referral to a physical therapist, vision specialist, or occupational therapist? Can my medications contribute to a fall?
- 4. Request a fall assessment.** Ask your healthcare provider to perform a functional assessment like the Timed Up and Go Test, 30-Second Chair Stand Test, or 4-Stage Balance Test.

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3. REVIEW MEDICATIONS WITH YOUR DOCTOR OR PHARMACIST

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Approximately 37% of those 60 years of age and older report using five or more prescription medications in the past month. Taking multiple medications can increase your risk of harmful drug interactions and adverse side effects, such as dizziness and dehydration. Among older adults, polypharmacy (or the use of multiple medications) can also increase the likelihood of hospitalization, falls, and medical complications. Talk to your doctor about your medications and request a medication review. Your doctor may determine that some medications are no longer necessary and should be stopped or replaced by safer medications that are equally effective. Never stop taking your medication without direction from your healthcare provider. Keep track of your medications and take them as prescribed.



Resources

Medication management is an essential activity to keep you healthy and ensure your health conditions are properly managed. The below resources can help you keep track of your medications and inform you of best practices for medication usage.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Personal Action Plan/Medicines List

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have developed two useful tools for tracking medication usage. Click [here](#) to access the Personal Medicines List which allows you to list all your medications in an organized way. Click [here](#) to access the Personal Action Plan which can help guide conversations with your doctor or pharmacist at least once a year, or when you change your medications.

Medications Linked to Falls

The *Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths, and Injuries Toolkit* contains a *Medications Linked to Falls Fact Sheet* which describes how proper medication management can reduce falls. Learn what types of medications can put you at higher risk. To access the fact sheet, click [here](#).

Medication Management in Older Adults Webinar

In this one-hour webinar, learn the basics of proper medication management for older adults, including general advice for safe medication use and steps for creating and maintaining a medication list. To access the webinar, click [here](#).

Safe Use of Medicines: Take Your Medicines the Right Way – Each Day!

Read this booklet for practical tips to make sure you are taking all your medications the right way and learn how older adults can manage their medications safely. To access the booklet, click [here](#).

Safe Prescription Drug Drop-Off Locations

Upon reviewing your medications, your doctor may choose to deprescribe inappropriate or unnecessary medications if they are no longer needed or if there are better alternatives. Medication take-back options are the best way to safely dispose of unused or expired prescription and nonprescription (i.e., over-the-counter) medicines. There are designated medication drop-off sites around San Diego County. For a list of year-round disposal options, click [here](#). ***Do not stop any medication without first talking to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.**

Vial of Life

The Vial of Life is a magnetized plastic sleeve that can be attached to your refrigerator door. Inside the sleeve is a form you can complete with important information for first responders to access in the event of a fall or medical emergency. Items you can list include health conditions or disabilities, current medications and immunizations, allergies, physician and emergency contacts, location of advanced healthcare directive (if applicable), and insurance details. Also included in the sleeve is a sticker that can be placed on your front door or window to notify first responders to look for the Vial of Life on your refrigerator door. To request a Vial of Life, please call (858) 495-5500 or email HealthierLiving.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov.

Other Information & Tips

Proper medication management can reduce your chances of harmful side effects and interactions that may lead to falls. Here are some tips to help you safely manage your medications.



- 1. Have a central location for your medications.** This includes prescriptions, supplements, vitamins, and over-the-counter medications. Store your medications in a cool, dry place like a dresser drawer or hallway cabinet away from the bathroom or hot appliances.
- 2. Create and maintain an up-to-date medication list.** Be sure to record medication name, frequency, dosage, purpose, and name of the prescribing healthcare provider (for prescriptions). Update this list, as needed.
- 3. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review your medications.** As a patient, it's your right to understand everything about a medication prescribed for you. Ask your healthcare provider to explain why the medication was prescribed, how it works, and any side effects you may experience.

- 4. Use a single pharmacy, if possible.** While you can transfer prescriptions between pharmacies, information may get delayed or lost in the transfer. This can cause delays in refills or make it harder for a pharmacist to identify any potential drug interactions. Most pharmacists have an electronic record of all the prescriptions a patient has filled through that pharmacy, making it easier to spot “red flag” combinations of drugs that might cause a problem.

- 5. Having trouble remembering to take your medications?** Develop a system. Pair taking your medications with an activity you do at the same time every day, like eating a meal or brushing your teeth. Invest in a pillbox. Put a reminder note some place it will be seen every day, such as the refrigerator or bathroom mirror.

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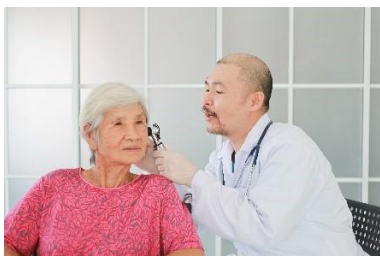
SIX EASY STEPS TO PREVENT FALLS

4. GET VISION AND HEARING CHECKED EVERY YEAR

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It's important to evaluate your sensory systems—including vision, hearing, and balance—in order to better understand your risk for falls. The balance system takes in sensory information from the vestibular (ear), visual, and proprioceptive (sense of touch) systems. The body uses all of this information to interpret the environment so we can maintain balance. The vestibular system provides key sensory information to the balance system and is located within the inner ear. An intact, well-functioning vestibular system helps with the prevention of falls.



Resources

With age can come changes that affect our eyes, ears, and balance leading to falls. The following organizations and resources provide information, programs, and/or services related to vision and hearing.

Braille Institute San Diego Center

Braille Institute San Diego Center offers a variety of free programs, vision loss resources, and services for people who are visually impaired or blind. Currently, they are providing online classes, workshops, and sessions. To learn more, visit brailleinstitute.org/sandiego or call (858) 452-1111.

San Diego Center for the Blind

The San Diego Center for the Blind helps blind and vision impaired individuals obtain their optimal level of independence through quality comprehensive vision rehabilitation services, such as counseling to help with the adjustment to vision loss and training/skill development. To learn more, visit sdcb.org or call the San Diego branch at (619) 583-1542 or Vista branch at (760) 758-5956.

California Telephone Access Program (CTAP)

CTAP is a program of the California Public Utilities Commission that provides free specialized phones and accessories for your mobile phone to all qualified Californians. These devices make it easier to hear, dial, and call. To learn more, visit californiaphones.org or call 1 (800) 806-1191.

Hearing Loss and Older Adults Fact Sheet

The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders developed a fact sheet that includes general information on hearing loss and available treatments and devices. To access the fact sheet, click [here](#).

Helping Older Adults See Well For a Lifetime Fact Sheet

The National Institutes of Health developed a fact sheet that includes general information on common age-related vision problems, low vision, ways to prevent vision loss, and other vision and aging resources. To access the fact sheet, click [here](#).

Vestibular Disorders Association (VeDA)

VeDA is a nonprofit organization that provides information, support, and advocacy to people with vestibular (inner ear and brain) balance disorders and the healthcare professionals who treat them. To learn more, visit vestibular.org.

Other Information & Tips

Sensory impairment is a common problem for older adults with one out of six having impaired vision and one out of four having impaired hearing. The good news is there are actions you can take to prevent falls related to your hearing and vision needs.



- 1. Get a vision and hearing exam/screening.** Because age-related hearing loss is common, those 60 and over should have a hearing screening on an annual basis. Additionally, get an eye exam that includes dilation at least once a year. This can dramatically reduce your risk of irreversible vision loss. Update glasses if needed.
- 2. Make sure all rooms and hallways are well lit.** Low lighting or sudden changes in lighting can make it difficult to see, increasing your risk for a fall. Install motion sensor lights or switches in dimly-lit areas.
- 3. If you have a hearing aid, be sure it fits well and wear it.** If you have hearing loss, there are other types of hearing assistive technology such as telephone amplifiers, caption assistance, remote microphones, and other alerting devices that you may want to consider.
- 4. Remove clutter.** Having a clear path in all the areas of your home can help make movement around the house much easier and safer, especially for someone with low or impaired vision.
- 5. Prevent pet-related falls.** It can be easy to trip over your cat or dog accidentally, especially when you can't hear them. Consider putting a small bell on their collar so you know when they are near.

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5. KEEP YOUR HOME SAFE

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According to AARP, 90% of older adults want to age-in-place and maintain independence; but here's the problem: 85% of older adults have done nothing to prepare their homes for aging. Furthermore, six out of every 10 falls happen at home. We spend much of our time at home and tend to move around without thinking about our safety. To maintain your independence, it's important to thoroughly assess your living space and make necessary changes so that you can continue to live safely in your home.



Resources

Want to improve the safety of your home but don't know where to start? The below resources and organizations can help you recognize and respond to potential hazards and, in some cases, provide free minor home modifications.

Jewish Family Service Fix-It Service

JFS Fix-It Service provides a four-point safety check, along with minor safety repairs and modifications to improve your mobility and security at home. All services are completed free-of-charge by a pre-screened team of volunteers. JFS Fix-It Service is available to adults ages 60 and older who reside in the North Central, Central, South, and East regions of San Diego County. For more information, call (858) 637-3210. North County residents, call Interfaith Community Services at (760) 489-6380 for service availability in your area.

Rebuilding Together

The Safe at Home program provides no-cost preventive home modifications to people with mobility issues and other disabilities to reduce falls, improve accessibility, facilitate aging-in-place, and increase independence. Safe at Home is designed to improve aging-in-place outcomes for low-income older adults through the modification

of their home environment to meet their specific needs. For more information, visit rebuildingtogethersd.org or call (619) 231-7873.

AARP HomeFit Guide

The HomeFit Guide is a 36-page, fully-illustrated resource with more than 100 suggestions and tips for creating an “aging-friendly” home. There are also HomeFit videos and a free HomeFit AR app (available for iPhone and iPad) that can be used to identify improvements that help make a home comfortable and safe. To access HomeFit resources, visit aarp.org/homefit.

Check for Safety: A Home Fall Prevention Checklist for Older Adults

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention developed a checklist that asks about hazards found in each room of your home. For each hazard, the checklist tells you how to fix the problem. At the end of the checklist, you’ll find other tips for preventing falls. To access the checklist, click [here](#).

Other Information & Tips

There are a number of simple and inexpensive changes you can make to your home to reduce the risk of falling. Here are some tips to help you increase safety in the different rooms and areas of your home.



Stairs and Steps:

- Always keep objects off the stairs
- Fix loose or uneven steps
- Have an electrician install an overhead light and light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs
- Make sure carpet is firmly attached to every step or remove the carpet and attach non-slip rubber treads to the stairs
- Fix loose handrails, or put in new ones
- Make sure handrails are on both sides of the stairs, and are as long as the stairs

Floors:

- Ask someone to move furniture so your path is clear
- Remove the rugs, or use double-sided tape or a non-slip backing so the rugs won’t slip
- Always keep objects off the floor
- Coil or tape cords and wires next to the wall so you can’t trip over them (if needed, have an electrician put in another outlet)

Kitchen:

- Keep things you use often on the lower shelves (about waist high)
- If you must use a step stool, get one with a bar to hold on to (never use a chair)
- Clean up spills immediately

Bedrooms:

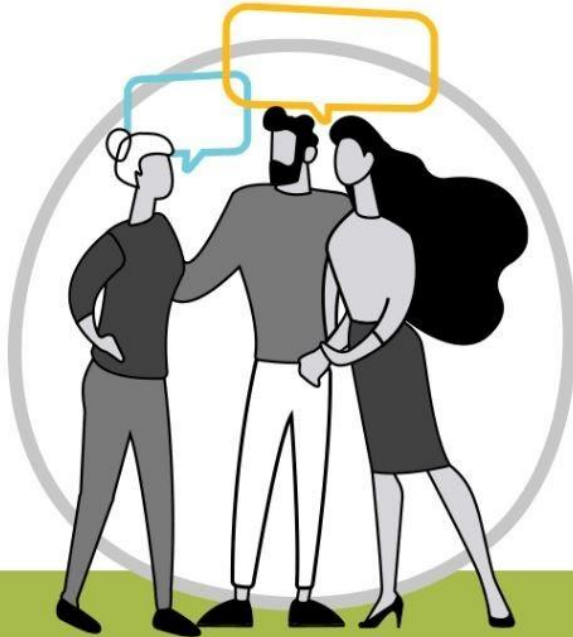
- Place a lamp close to the bed where it’s easy to reach
- Put in a nightlight so you can see where you’re walking (some turn on automatically after dark)
- Ensure proper bed height (when sitting on edge of bed, your knees should be at a 90 degree angle with both feet flat on floor)

Bathrooms:

- Put a non-slip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub or shower
- Have grab bars put in next to and inside the tub, and next to the toilet

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6. TALK WITH YOUR FAMILY

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Fall prevention is a team effort and should involve your loved ones. You know them, you trust them, and they are happy to help, especially when it comes to your safety. Family and friends can provide extra hands or another set of eyes to check and rid your home of fall hazards. The next time they come over to visit or help around the house, ask them to take a little extra time helping you find common fall hazards. Family and friends can also join you during doctor visits and help ask questions and gather information about preventing falls.



Review

Falls can have very serious consequences as we age, but there are proven ways to reduce and prevent them. During the month of September, we shared these six easy steps to prevent falls:

1. Find a Balance or Exercise Program.

Why is this important? Certain exercises help build leg strength and improve body mechanics and balance, which are all important in reducing falls.

2. Tell Your Doctor if You've Had a Fall or Are Afraid of Falling.

Why is this important? A fall can be a sign of a medical condition or other serious concern. If your doctor is unaware that you have fallen, they will not have the opportunity to address any underlying concerns or provide informed treatment.

3. Review Medications with Your Doctor or Pharmacist.

Why is this important? Proper medication management, which includes having your medications reviewed regularly, can reduce harmful drug interactions and side effects that may lead to fall.

4. Get Vision or Hearing Checked Annually.

Why is this important? Impaired vision and/or hearing can affect how you interpret and navigate your environment, which can lead to a fall. Having your vision and hearing checked every year can ensure that any impairments are caught early and responded to appropriately.

5. Keep Your Home Safe.

Why is this important? Most falls occur at home which is where we spend a lot of our time. Oftentimes, small changes to improve the safety of your living environment can make a difference in preventing slips, trips, and falls, and any subsequent injuries.

6. Talk With Your Family.

Why is this important? Falling is not just an older adult issue—family members can help you stay safe. Enlist their support and work together to develop a plan to prevent future falls.