

Patient Education Sheet

Community Falls and Fall Safety Tips

A fall can change your life. If you're elderly, it can lead to disability and a loss of independence.

If your bones are fragile from osteoporosis, you could break a bone, often a hip.

Aging alone does not make people fall. However, falls and accidents seldom "just happen."

Many things, like the conditions listed below can make a fall more likely:

Fall Facts

- One in three people, 65 and over, fall each year.
- Falls are often the result of lifestyle, medical and environmental causes.
- About 60% of falls occur in or around the home.
- Being acutely ill, using alcohol or having difficulty with walking or balance and not using a walking aide increases risk.
- Multiple medical conditions and medications also increase risk.
 - Diabetes, heart disease, and problems with circulation, thyroid or the nervous system affect balance.
 - Drugs that act on the nervous system can affect coordination, balance, blood pressure, and sensation, as well as cause feelings of faintness.

- Sleeping medications and other medications that make you drowsy are known to increase fall risk.

Fall Reduction Interventions

There are fall reduction measures that you can follow to reduce the risk of fall related to medications, inactivity, and environmental hazards.

Medications:

Check with your doctor or pharmacist about side effects and drug interactions of all prescription and over the counter medications.

- Be sure that your primary care clinician knows what medications and herbals you are taking
- Take only those medications and herbal remedies that your clinician considers essential to maintaining good health
- If you are experiencing dizziness, changes in ability to walk or changes in memory ask your physician for guidance about possible changes in your medications and herbals.
 - The physician may want to discontinue unessential meds or herbals, replace medication or reduce excessive dosages.

Activity:

Exercise whenever possible.

Multiple studies confirm that exercise and resistance training programs are effective in reducing injury.

Even moderate levels of activity, such as walking, can lower the risk of hip fracture.

- *A physical therapist can help you learn to do helpful exercises and provide you with walking and balance training*
- *Tai Chi and Yoga are beneficial exercises*
- *Excellent exercise education programs are available:*
 - *Pep Up Your Life: A Fitness Book for Mid-Life and Older Persons.* The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports:
<http://fitness.gov/activelife/activelife.html>
 - *Exercise: A Guide From the National Institute on Aging, Washington, DC. Publication No. NIH 99-4258.*
 - *Don't Let a Fall Be Your Last Trip*
<http://orthoinfo.aaos.org>
American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons.
- Use nonskid adhesive textured strips or non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors.
- Mount a liquid soap dispenser on the bathtub/shower wall.
- Place secure carpeting over concrete, ceramic, and marble floors to lessen severity of injury if a fall should occur, such as, adjacent to the bathtub/shower.
- If unsteady, use a sturdy, plastic seat in the bathtub and use either raised toilet seat or seat with armrests.
 - Improve lighting throughout your home and/or provide proper lighting for all rooms, hallways and stairs.
 - Use night-lights in strategic locations.
 - Keep flashlights nearby your bed in case of a power outage.
- Avoid taking risks such as standing on chairs or boxes.

Make Living Areas Safer

- Frequently used objects such as: food, dishes, and cooking equipment, should be placed within easy reach.
- Beds and furniture should not be too high or too low.
- Grab bars or handrails should be installed in areas, such as bathrooms and hallways and have handrails on both sides of stairways.
- Different floor surfaces can pose risk. It is important that floors not be slick, glossy, elevated, or uneven Do not run electrical or phone wires and cords under rugs or across main traffic areas.
- Use only a step stool with an attached handrail when retrieving out-of-reach objects.
- Avoid leaving objects on stairs.
- Discard or replace wobbly chairs, ladders and tables.
- Immediately clean up any liquid, grease or food spill.
- Avoid icy pavements and uneven pavements especially around your home.
- Have easy access to a telephone so you can call for help if needed and keep a telephone near your bed.
- Consider carrying a portable phone or getting a Personal Emergency

Response System, especially if you live alone.

- Ask your clinician about such products.

Other Measures:

- **To reduce the chances of breaking a bone if you do fall, make sure that you get enough calcium and vitamin D. Postmenopausal women and anyone who has experienced a broken bone should be evaluated for osteoporosis.**
- Discuss with your physician or physical therapist use of safety devices to reduce the risk of a break in the event of a fall, such as hip protectors.

Take care of your health, eat healthy foods, exercise, get regular eye exams and physicals in order to help reduce your chance of falling.

Other Tips

- Get rid of tripping hazards in your home such as clutter in walkways and throw rugs, or tape down your rugs.
- Wear low-heeled, supportive footwear with nonskid soles to prevent tripping and slipping.
- Avoid wearing floppy bedroom slippers and high heels.
- Wear clothes that fit properly, since an overlong coat, pair of pants, or bathrobe poses a tripping hazard.

- Avoid excessive alcohol intake and stop smoking.
- Sit on the edge of the bed upon awakening to ensure that you are not dizzy before getting out of bed, and proceed slowly.
- Wear glasses if needed, but remove reading glasses before walking.
- Eat breakfast every morning.
 - Skipping a meal could result in dizziness.
- Keep cane or walker next to you and use as instructed.
 - *Replace the rubber tips on cane or walker when worn.*

Tell your primary care clinician about any falls that you experience. And request an examination to evaluate for a new health condition or the progression of a chronic illness that may signal a need for diagnosis, treatment, walking aide, modification of life style habits or changes in activities of daily living.

Notes and Questions for your clinician _____

