



BE SAFE: Prevent Falls



Did you know there are practical steps you can take to be safe? It is important to be safe and protect yourself from falls. Read below to learn more about how to prevent falls.

How dangerous are falls in the home?

- Among older adults, falls are the leading cause of deaths from injuries. About half of all falls happen at home.
- Falls are also the most common cause of non-fatal injuries and hospital admissions for trauma.
- If you or a loved one has fallen recently or has balance problems, make sure your home is safe. You can request a home safety assessment from your VA health care team.

What can I do to prevent falls in my home?

- Prevent tripping and falling by removing small throw rugs. If you choose to use them, anchor them with double-sided tape or anti-slip mats underneath.
- Improve the lighting in your home. As you get older, you need brighter lights to help you see well. Hang light weight curtains or shades to reduce glare.
- Wear shoes inside and outside the house. Avoid walking barefoot or wearing slippers.
- Remove things (papers, books, clothes, shoes) from stairs and places where you walk, so you will be less likely to trip.
- Keep items you use often in cabinets that you can reach easily without using a step stool.
- Make sure you use non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors.
- Install grab bars next to your toilet and in your tub or shower. Also install handrails and lights in all staircases.
- You can use a walker or a cane for extra support.

A Better Way to
LIVE

*Talk with your
health care team
about your goals.*



What else can I do to prevent falls?

- Physical activity, especially strengthening exercises, may reduce your risk of falling by increasing strength and balance (see the *Be Physically Active* handout). Physical activity makes you stronger and helps you feel better.
 - Physical activities that improve balance and coordination (like Tai Chi) are the most helpful.
 - Lack of physical activity leads to weakness and increases your chances of falling.
 - If you need help deciding what types of physical activity are good for you, ask your doctor or health care team.
- Sometimes medicine can make you feel dizzy or unsteady on your feet, especially if the medicine is new. Tell your health care team if you feel dizzy or unsteady on your feet.
- Avoid alcohol and sleep medications.
- Get your eyes checked regularly by an eye doctor to make sure your eyesight is as good as it can be.

Talk to your health care provider about preventing falls if:

- You are concerned about falling.
- You are on medicines that make you feel dizzy or unsteady on your feet.
- You have suddenly fallen without getting dizzy.
- You are at increased risk of injury due to osteoporosis (brittle bones).
- You are on blood thinners.
- You have been injured as a result of a fall.

FOR THE MOST CURRENT INFORMATION AND OTHER RESOURCES:

- VHA National Center for Health Promotion & Disease Prevention: www.prevention.va.gov. Go to the *Healthy Living* tab and choose “Be Safe”
- Veterans Health Library: www.veteranshealthlibrary.org, search “preventing falls”

If you have questions about how to make healthy living changes, please talk with your health care team.