

Health Bulletin

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

#79 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues of pressing interest to all New Yorkers

How to Prevent Falls

A guide for older adults



• Available in Spanish, Chinese and other languages: call 311 or visit nyc.gov/health
• Disponible en español: llame al 311 o visite nyc.gov/health
• 需要中文服務 - 可電 311 或造訪網址: nyc.gov/health



To prevent falls, take care of your health.

Be physically active.

- Regular exercise improves mood and makes you healthier at any age. It's never too late to start.
- Physical activity helps prevent and control high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes and many other conditions.
- Exercise also lowers your chances of falling because it strengthens muscles and improves balance.
- Adults should get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity, such as a brisk walk, at least 5 days a week. But any amount is good — some activity is better than none!
- You can spread out your activity — you don't have to do it all at once. Just 10 minutes at a time is fine.
- Exercise that improves balance and coordination, such as Tai Chi, is especially helpful in preventing falls — but any kind of exercise is good.
- Ask your doctor or health care provider about the best type of physical activity for you.

Ask your health care provider to review all your medicines.

- As you get older, medicines may affect you differently. Some medicines, or combinations of medicines, can make you sleepy or dizzy and can cause you to fall.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review all the medicines you take, including herbal remedies and over-the-counter



drugs. Your doctor can change your medicines and tell you if there are any you no longer need.

Have your vision checked.

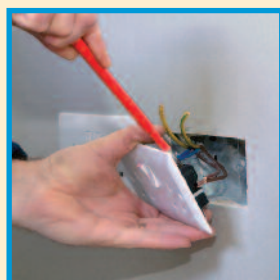
- Poor vision can increase your risk of falls, so visit an eye doctor at least once a year.
- You may be wearing the wrong glasses or have a condition like glaucoma or cataracts that limits your vision.



Most falls happen at home among older adults. Use this checklist to make your home safer.

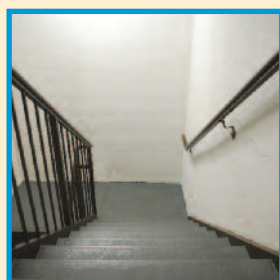
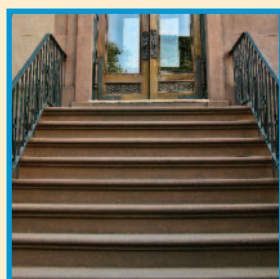
Floors

- Furniture.** Is furniture in your way? Rearrange it so your path is clear.
- Throw rugs.** It's easy to slip on throw rugs. Get rid of them, or use double-sided tape or a non-slip backing to keep them in place.
- Clutter.** Are there papers, books, shoes, magazines, boxes or other objects on the floor? Pick them up!
- Wires.** Coil or tape telephone and electrical extension cords and wires next to the wall so you can't trip over them. Have extra outlets installed if you need them.



Inside and outside stairs and steps

- Pick up papers, shoes and other clutter — always keep stairs clear.
- Have loose or uneven steps repaired.
- Make sure that carpet is firmly attached to every step. Or remove the carpet and use non-slip rubber treads instead.
- Have overhead lights and switches installed at the top and bottom of the stairs. You can get light switches that glow to make them easier to see.
- Replace burned out light bulbs right away.
- Have loose handrails fixed, or put in new ones. Make sure handrails are on both sides of the stairs and run the full length of the stairway.



Kitchen

- Are the things you use the most on high shelves? Move them down, to about waist level.
- Step stools can be dangerous. If you must use one, buy a stool with a bar to hold on to. Never use a chair as a step stool!



Bathrooms

- Use non-slip mats or self-stick strips in the bathtub and on the shower floor.
- Have horizontal grab bars properly installed next to the tub and the toilet.



Bedrooms

- Place lamps close to the bed, where they are easy to reach.
- Is the path from your bed to the bathroom dark? Put in a night-light so you can see where you're going.



Other Safety Tips

- Get up slowly after you sit or lie down.
- Wear shoes both inside and outside the house. Avoid going barefoot or wearing slippers.
- Improve the lighting in your home. As you get older, you need brighter lights to see well. Hang lightweight curtains or shades to reduce glare.
- Keep emergency numbers in large print near each phone.
- Put a phone near the floor in case you fall and can't get up.
- Think about wearing an alarm device that will bring help in case you fall.



What You Can Do to Prevent Falls



- 1** Be physically active.
- 2** Ask your health care provider to review all your medicines.
- 3** Have your vision checked.
- 4** Make your home safer.

More Information and Help

- **New York City Health Department:**
nyc.gov/html/doh/html/ip/ip-index.shtml
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:**
cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/adultfalls.html
- **New York State Department of Health:**
health.state.ny.us/prevention/injury_prevention/
- **New York City Department for the Aging:**
nyc.gov/html/dfta/downloads/pdf/fallsandfractures.pdf
- **National Institute on Aging:**
nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/falls.htm

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311**

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