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CDC FOUNDATION

MetLife Foundation

Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Check for Safety

A Home Fall Prevention Checklist for Older Adults

For more information, contact:
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
770-488-1506
www.cdc.gov/injury

CDC FOUNDATION

MetLife Foundation

"Making changes in our home to prevent falls is good for us and for our granddaughter when she comes to visit."

FALLS AT HOME

Each year, thousands of older Americans fall at home. Many of them are seriously injured, and some are disabled. In 2002, more than 12,800 people over age 65 died and 1.6 million were treated in emergency departments because of falls.

Falls are often due to hazards that are easy to overlook but easy to fix. This checklist will help you find and fix those hazards in your home.

The checklist 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.

"Last Saturday our son helped us move our furniture. Now all the rooms have clear paths."

FLOORS: Look at the floor in each room.

Q: When you walk through a room, do you have to walk around furniture?

☐ Ask someone to move the furniture so your path is clear.

Q: Do you have throw rugs on the floor?

☐ Remove the rugs or use double-sided tape or a non-slip backing so the rugs won't slip.

Q: Are there papers, books, towels, shoes, magazines, boxes, blankets, or other objects on the floor?

☐ Pick up things that are on the floor. Always keep objects off the floor.

Q: Do you have to walk over or around wires or cords (like lamp, telephone, or extension cords)?

☐ 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.

STAIRS AND STEPS: Look at the stairs you use both inside and outside your home.

Q: Are there papers, shoes, books, or other objects on the stairs?

☐ Pick up things on the stairs. Always keep objects off stairs.

Q: Are some steps broken or uneven?

☐ Fix loose or uneven steps.

Q: Are you missing a light over the stairway?

☐ Have an electrician put in an overhead light at the top and bottom of the stairs.

Q: Do you have only one light switch for your stairs (only at the top or at the bottom of the stairs)?

☐ Have an electrician put in a light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs. You can get light switches that glow.

Q: Has the stairway light bulb burned out?

☐ Have a friend or family member change the light bulb.

Q: Is the carpet on the steps loose or torn?

☐ Make sure the carpet is firmly attached to every step, or remove the carpet and attach non-slip rubber treads to the stairs.

Q: Are the handrails loose or broken? Is there a handrail on only one side of 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.

Photo courtesy of Jake Pauls

KITCHEN: Look at your kitchen and eating area.

Q: Are the things you use often on high shelves?

☐ Move items in your cabinets. Keep things you use often on the lower shelves (about waist level).

Q: Is your step stool unsteady?

☐ If you must use a step stool, get one with a bar to hold on to. Never use a chair as a step stool.

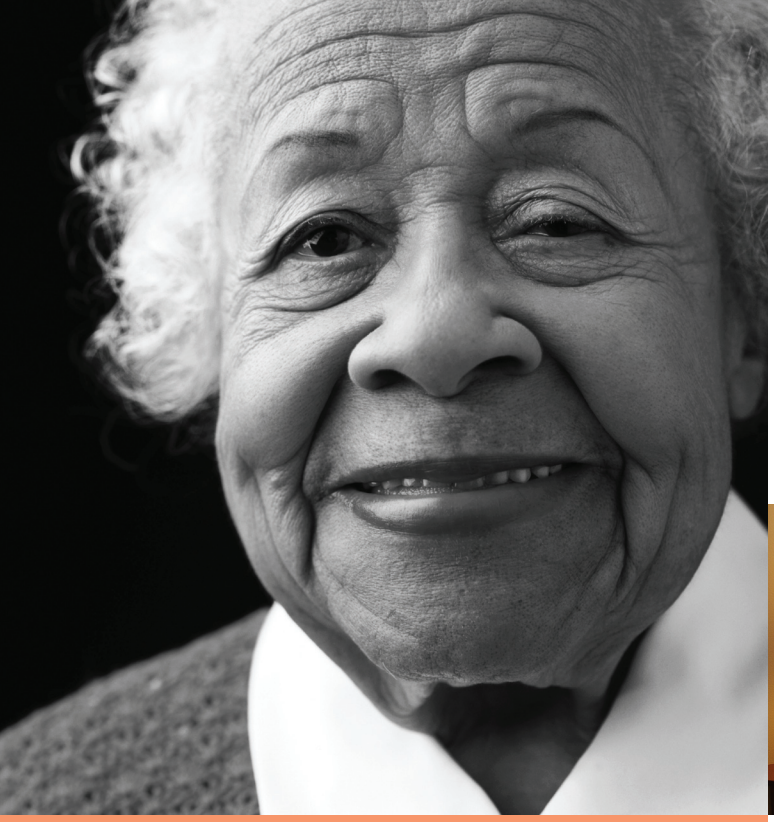
BATHROOMS: Look at all your bathrooms.

Q: Is the tub or shower floor slippery?

☐ Put a non-slip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub or shower.

Q: Do you need some support when you get in and out of the tub or up from the toilet?

☐ Have a carpenter put grab bars inside the tub and next to the toilet.



"I put a lamp on each side of my bed. Now it's easy to find the light if I wake up at night."

BEDROOMS: Look at all your bedrooms.

Q: Is the light near the bed hard to reach?

☐ Place a lamp close to the bed where it's easy to reach.

Q: Is the path from your bed to the bathroom dark?

☐ Put in a night-light so you can see where you're walking. Some night-lights go on by themselves after dark.

Other Things You Can Do to Prevent Falls

- ☐ Exercise regularly. Exercise makes you stronger and improves your balance and coordination.

- ☐ Have your doctor or pharmacist look at all the medicines you take, even over-the-counter medicines. Some medicines can make you sleepy or dizzy.
- ☐ Have your vision checked at least once a year by an eye doctor. Poor vision can increase your risk of falling.
- ☐ 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. Put in brighter light bulbs. Florescent bulbs are bright and cost less to use.
- ☐ It's safest to have uniform lighting in a room. Add lighting to dark areas. Hang lightweight curtains or shades to reduce glare.
- ☐ Paint a contrasting color on the top edge of all steps so you can see the stairs better. For example, use a light color paint on dark wood.

"I feel stronger and better about myself since I started walking every day."

Other Safety Tips

- ☐ 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 and can't get up.

Risk Factors For Falls

Research has identified many risk factors that contribute to falling—some of these are modifiable.

Most falls are caused by the interaction of multiple risk factors. The more risk factors a person has, the greater their chances of falling. Healthcare providers can lower a person's risk by reducing or minimizing that individual's risk factors.

To prevent falls, providers should focus **FIRST** on these modifiable risk factors:

- Lower body weakness
- Difficulties with gait and balance
- Use of psychoactive medications
- Postural dizziness
- Poor vision
- Problems with feet and/or shoes
- Home hazards

Fall risk factors are categorized as intrinsic or extrinsic.

Intrinsic	Extrinsic
Advanced age	Lack of stair handrails
Previous falls	Poor stair design
Muscle weakness	Lack of bathroom grab bars
Gait & balance problems	Dim lighting or glare
Poor vision	Obstacles & tripping hazards
Postural hypotension	Slippery or uneven surfaces
Chronic conditions including arthritis, diabetes, stroke, Parkinson's, incontinence, dementia	Psychoactive medications
Fear of falling	Improper use of assistive device

For more information, go to: www.cdc.gov/injury/STEADI

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

STEADI Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths & Injuries

Many falls can be prevented. By making some changes, you can lower your chances of falling.

Four things **YOU** can do to prevent falls:

1. Exercise to improve your balance & strength
2. Have your healthcare provider review all your medicines
3. Have your vision checked & update your eyeglasses
4. Make your home safer

"I feel more confident and my balance is much better since I started taking Tai Chi."

For more information, contact:
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1(800)CDC-INFO (232-4636)
www.cdc.gov/injury

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What YOU Can Do

To Prevent Falls

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Four things **YOU** can do to prevent falls:

❶ Exercise to improve your balance & strength

Exercises that improve balance & make your legs stronger lower your chances of falling. An example is Tai Chi.

Lack of exercise leads to weakness & increases your chances of falling.

Ask your doctor or healthcare provider about the best type of exercise program for you.

❷ Have your medicines reviewed

Have your doctor or pharmacist review the medicines you take, even over-the-counter medicines.

As you get older, the way medicines work in your body can change.

Medicines or combinations of medicines can make you sleepy or dizzy and can cause you to fall.

❸ Have your vision checked

Poor vision can increase your chances of falling.

See an eye doctor at least once a year & update your eyeglasses.

You may be wearing the wrong glasses or have a condition like glaucoma.

❹ Make your home safer

- ☐ Remove things you can trip over (like papers, books, & shoes) from stairs & places where you walk.
- ☐ Remove small throw rugs or use double-sided tape to keep the rugs from slipping.
- ☐ Keep items you use often where you can reach them without using a step stool.
- ☐ Have grab bars put in next to & inside the tub or shower and next to the toilet.
- ☐ Use non-slip mats in the bathtub & on shower floors.
- ☐ Improve the lighting in your home especially on stairs. As you get older, you need brighter lights to see well.
- ☐ Have handrails put in on both sides of all staircases.
- ☐ Always wear shoes. Avoid going barefoot or wearing slippers.

Talking with your Patient about Falls

If you hear:	You can say:
Precontemplation Stage	
Falling is just a matter of bad luck.	As we age, falls are more likely for many reasons, including changes in our balance and how we walk.
Contemplation Stage	
My friend down the street fell and ended up in a nursing home.	Preventing falls can prevent broken hips & help you stay independent.
Preparation Stage	
I'm worried about falling. Do you think there's anything I can do to keep from falling?	Let's look at some factors that may make you likely to fall & talk about what you could do about one or two of them.
Action Stage	
I know a fall can be serious. What can I do to keep from falling and stay independent?	I'm going to fill out a referral form for a specialist who can help you improve your balance.

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National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

Preventing Falls in Older Patients

Provider Pocket Guide

Key Facts about Falls:

- 1/3 of older adults (age 65+) fall each year.
- Many patients who have fallen do not talk about it.

This is What You Can Do:

RITUAL:

Review self-assessment brochure
Identify risk factors
Test gait & balance
Undertake multifactorial assessment
Apply interventions
Later, follow-up

STEADI Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths & Injuries

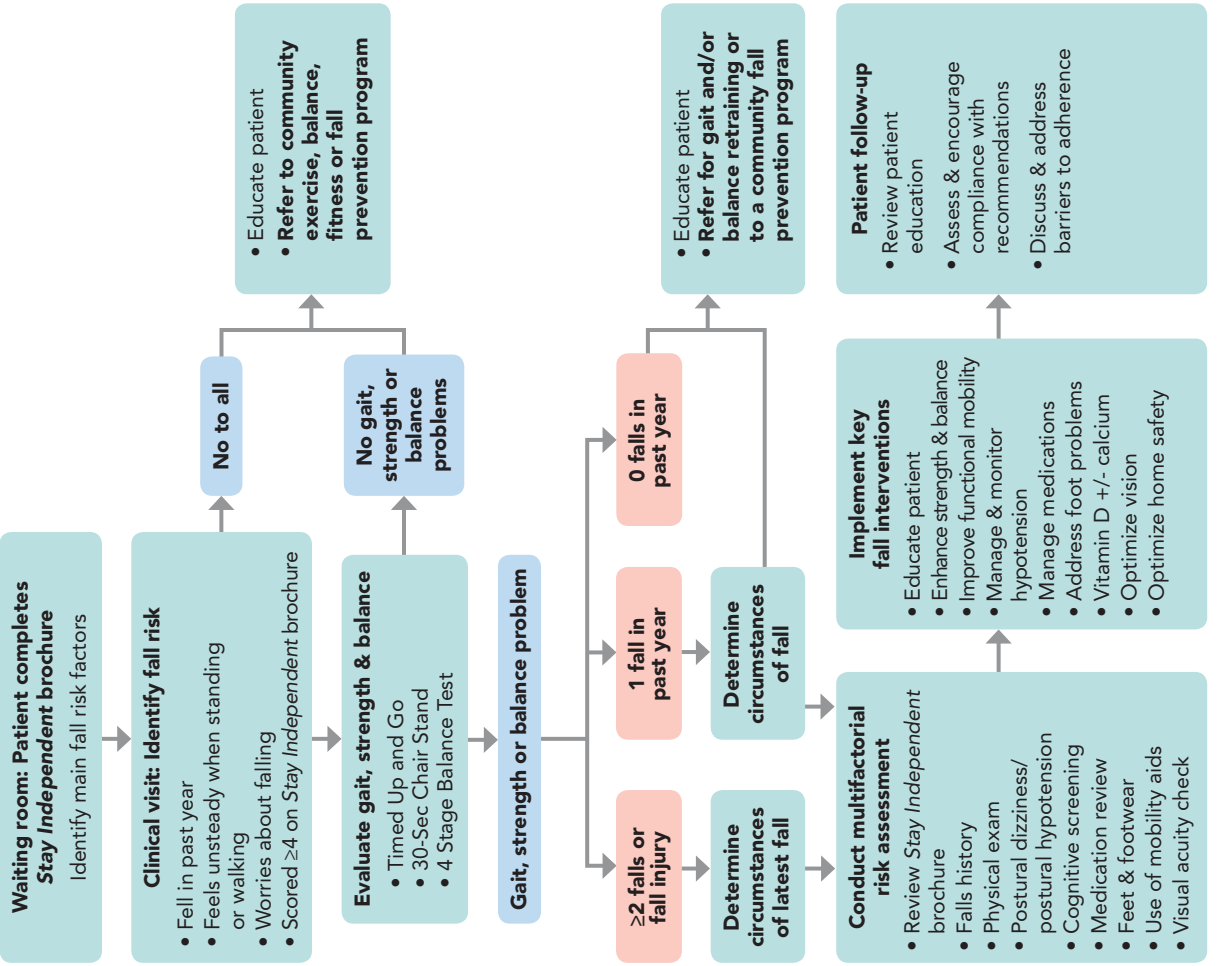
Key Steps for Fall Prevention

1. Be proactive—ask all patients 65+ if they've fallen in the past year.
2. Identify & address fall risk factors:
   - Lower body weakness
   - Gait and balance problems
   - Psychoactive medications
   - Postural dizziness
   - Poor vision
   - Problems with feet and/or shoes
   - Home safety
3. Refer as needed to specialists or community programs.
4. Follow-up with patient within 30 days.

Key Fall Interventions

- Educate patient
- Enhance strength & balance
- Manage medications
- Manage hypotension
- Supplement vitamin D +/- calcium
- Address foot problems
- Optimize vision
- Optimize home safety

Algorithm for Fall Risk Assessment & Interventions



Minnesota Falls Prevention

Enjoy the Outdoors

Being outside in the fresh air can help you to feel good. When you step outside, give your eyes time to adjust to the outdoor light. Wear sunglasses year round to reduce glare and see well. Stay safe by using your cane or walking aid.

Watch Your Step

- Keep steps and sidewalks free of newspapers, leaves, and twigs.
- Look out for pets. It is easy to trip over a pet and their toys in your path.
- Watch for cracks in steps and sidewalks or changes in elevation.
- When you see a tree ahead in your path, watch for the low-hanging branches, tree roots or fallen branches on the ground.

Take Your Time

- Hurrying puts you at risk of falling.
- Take your time when getting on and off the bus and crossing the street.
- Be aware of curbs and ramps, especially when getting in or out of a car.
- Unload your car in several small trips.
- Carrying too much may block your vision or cause you to lose your balance.

During the Winter

Winter can be a difficult time of year to get out and about. Stay safe by following these simple tips:

- Wear boots with non-skid soles.
- Shovel snow off steps and pathways to your home. Ask for help if you need it.
- Sprinkle de-icer, salt or sand on icy steps and sidewalks. Put a scoop or plastic cup in the bag and use what you need. De-icer costs about $3 per bag.
- If you go out for the newspaper or mail, have a neighbor watch you walk down the path.

During the Summer

Summer is a great time to be outdoors. Follow these simple tips to stay right side up:

- Wear supportive footwear with non-skid soles indoors and outdoors. No slip-ons.
- Take care when walking on slippery, wet surfaces. Wet grass and a sidewalk covered with wet leaves can be dangerous.
- Keep your pathways free of outdoor furniture and garden hoses.
- Put garden tools away when you are not using them.

Learn more at our website: www.mnfallsprevention.org
or call the Senior LinkAge Line® at 1-800-333-2433.

05/08

Minnesota Falls Prevention

Move Your Body

Moving your body every day can help you feel better and enjoy life more. Being active gives you the energy you need to climb stairs and do household chores. It will help you stay flexible so you can wash your hair and tie your shoes. Keep your body moving to stay independent.

Get the Green Light

- Talk with your doctor or health care provider before becoming physically active.
- Share with them your goal of preventing a fall.
- Ask for suggestions to get you started.
- Thirty minutes a day of exercise is recommended but break it into 10-15 minute blocks if that is easier — it's the daily total that matters.

Walk — It's an Easy and Free Way to Move

- Walk every day, even if it's only around the house.
- Start slow, 5 to 10 minutes a day.
- Walk wherever and whenever you can.
- Get off the bus a stop earlier or park your car farther away.
- Find an enjoyable, safe place to walk — go to a lake, a park, indoor shopping mall or walk the hallway in your building.
- Find a partner — you can walk farther when you walk with a friend.

Easy Moving at Home

- Stretch your arms wide open when you get up in the morning.
- Roll your shoulders forward, making small circles. Then roll your shoulders back, making small circles.
- Stand on one foot for 10 seconds (while washing dishes, brushing your teeth, or watching TV). Change feet.
- Do side leg lifts. Stand behind a sturdy chair and place both hands on the back of the chair for support. Slowly lift one leg out to the side. Pause. Slowly lower your foot back to the floor. Repeat up to 10 times. Switch to other leg.

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Minnesota Falls Prevention

Be Safe at Home

Most falls occur at home. Stay safe and independent in your home by following these simple suggestions.

Keep Your Path Clear

- Move books, boxes, shoes and clutter out of your path and off stairs.
- Move extension, appliance and telephone cords that you can trip over.
- Watch where your pets are sleeping or lying down.
- Rearrange furniture to allow a clear path. If the furniture is heavy, ask for help.

Don't Give Your Feet a Reason to Trip

- Put away those throw and scatter rugs!
- Apply double-sided tape to the back of carpet to keep it from moving. Double-sided tape costs $3 to $7 at a hardware or discount store.
- Take your time when getting to the phone or to answer the door. Rushing may cause you to trip and fall.
- When walking up and down stairs, take your time and use the handrail.

Brighten Up Your Apartment or House

- Turn the lights on as you move through the house and up and down the stairs.
- Use nightlights to brighten bedrooms, halls and bathrooms.
- Have a lamp or flashlight and your glasses within easy reach of your bed.
- Keep a small flashlight on your keychain. A keychain flashlight costs $2 to $10 at a discount store or sporting goods store.
- When spending the night away from home, take along a flashlight so when you wake up in an unfamiliar room you can find your way to the bathroom.

Keep Your Bathroom Fall Free

- Use a non-slip mat in the tub or shower. Non-slip mats cost $5 to $7 at a hardware store, discount store or medical supply store.
- Use a bath bench or shower stool. These items cost $21 to $30 at a discount store, medical supply store, or ask for help ordering one on-line.
- Install a grab bar by the toilet and in the tub or shower. A towel rack doesn't work — it can pull out of the wall. Call the Senior LinkAge Line® (1-800-333-2433) to find a professional who installs grab bars.

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