

FALLS PREVENTION RESOURCE GUIDE

Keeping Seniors Standing Strong!



FALLS PREVENTION COALITION

Serving the towns and cities of Groton, New London,
East Lyme, Lyme, Old Lyme, Waterford, Ledyard,
Stonington and North Stonington



Falls Prevention Resource Guide

Falls in seniors aged 65 years and over is a public health issue as it is the leading cause of unintentional deaths in Connecticut. Falls can cause debilitating injuries, loss of independence, often death and are financially costly. Falls are preventable.

This resource guide is the result of collaboration between many community partners who have volunteered their time to work on providing materials to help decrease the incidence of falls in our senior population.

**1 in 3 adults aged
65 years and older
fall each year**

A more comprehensive Falls Prevention Resource section can be found on the Ledge Light Health District web site: www.llhd.org. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call the nurse at Ledge Light Health District at 860-448-4882 ext. 331.

This guide is divided four sections that MAPS out how to prevent falls.

1. Medications:

2. Assessment: *ways to determine if at risk for falls*

3. Physical Activity:

4. Safety: *inside & outside*

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USE MEDICATION REMINDERS

Using medication aides such as pill boxes or medication reminder phone apps are useful in reminding us when to take our medications so we don't miss doses or take a double dose by mistake.



REVIEW YOUR MEDICATION

Make an appointment with your pharmacist to review ALL of the medications you take. “Brown bag” up all of your prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, herbal medicines, vitamins and supplements for the pharmacist to review. The pharmacist can discuss what the medication is for, special instructions for taking the medicine, possible side effects and interactions.

OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICATIONS

Over-the-counter medications that treat certain conditions can cause falls. Carefully read the label before using these types of medicines.

- Allergies/cold/congestion
- Heartburn
- Pain
- Sleep



PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS

Prescription medicines for these problems may increase your fall risk. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist. Sit on the edge of the bed and dangle your feet a bit before getting out of bed. Stand a few seconds before moving when getting up from a sitting position. If you are having dizziness after getting out of bed let your doctor know. You may have postural hypotension which means your blood pressure drops when you stand up.



- Allergies & colds
- Aggression/ anger
- Anxiety & nerves
- Blood pressure
- Bowel & bladder problems
- Cramps & muscle spasms
- Depression
- Heart problems
- Mood disorders
- Pain (especially narcotics)
- Parkinson's disease
- Seizures
- Sleep
- Swelling (water pills)

MEDICATION SAFETY TIPS

- ☞ Keep an updated list of all medications including prescriptions, over the counter medications, vitamins and herbals in your wallet for easy access.
- ☞ Know which foods can alter the effectiveness of your medications.
- ☞ Know why you are taking the medication. Go over your medicine list with your doctor and don't be afraid to ask questions. Always tell your doctor of any changes in your health.
- ☞ Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you do not want to take your medicines or have side effects- do not stop on your own.
- ☞ Mixing alcohol with some medications can make them less effective, cause harmful side effects or make them toxic to your system.
- ☞ Safely discard medicines that are out of date- police stations in the City of Groton, Ledyard, New London, Waterford, East Lyme and Stonington have drug return drop boxes. Never flush medications down the toilet.
- ☞ Use one pharmacy so the pharmacist knows which medications you are taking and can screen for possible drug interactions.
- ☞ Do not share medicines with your family or friends. Keep all medications out of reach of children.
- ☞ Take your medication as prescribed. Do not take more of the medication because it makes you feel better! Do not double up your medication if you missed a dose. When in doubt, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

A

• Assessments

Falls don't "just happen," and people don't fall because they get older. Often, more than one underlying cause or risk factor is involved in a fall. A risk factor is something that increases a person's risk or susceptibility to a medical problem or disease.

As the number of risk factors rises, so does the risk of falling. Many falls are linked to a person's physical condition or a medical problem, such as a chronic disease.



An assessment by a healthcare professional is in order to help determine what the problem is and what can be done to help prevent falls.

Muscle weakness, especially in the legs, is one of the most important risk factors. Older people with weak muscles are more likely to fall than are those who maintain their muscle strength, as well as their flexibility and endurance. Let your doctor know if you have muscle weakness.

Your balance and your gait -- how you walk -- are other key factors. Older adults who have poor balance or difficulty walking are more likely than others to fall. These problems may be linked to a lack of exercise or to a neurological cause, arthritis, or other medical conditions and their treatments. Be sure to talk to your doctor!

Blood pressure that drops too much when you get up from lying down or sitting can increase your chance of falling. This condition -- called postural hypotension -- might result from dehydration, or certain medications. It might also be linked to diabetes, neurological conditions such as Parkinson's disease, or an infection. Let your doctor know if you feel dizzy when you stand up. Your blood pressure should be taken with you lying, sitting and standing to see if it drops when you stand.

Your reflexes may also be slower than when you were younger. The increased amount of time it takes you to react may make it harder to catch your balance if you start to fall.

Foot problems that cause painful feet, and wearing unsafe footwear can increase your chance of falling. Backless shoes and slippers, high-heeled shoes, and shoes with smooth leather soles are examples of unsafe footwear that could cause a fall.

Sensory problems can cause falls, too. If your senses don't work well, you might be less aware of your environment. For instance, having numbness in your feet may mean you don't sense where you are stepping.

Not seeing well can also result in falls. One reason is that it may take a while for your eyes to adjust to see clearly when you move between darkness and light. Other vision problem contributing to falls include poor depth perception, cataracts, and glaucoma.

People with a mild hearing loss are nearly three times more likely to have a history of falling. The greater the hearing loss the greater the risk of falling. When people can't hear well, they may not have a good awareness of their surroundings, increasing the chance of tripping and falling.

Confusion, even for a short while, can sometimes lead to falls. For example, if you wake up in an unfamiliar environment, you might feel unsure of where you are. If you feel confused, wait for your mind to clear or until someone comes to help you before trying to get up and walk around.

Some medications can increase a person's risk of falling because they cause side effects like dizziness or confusion. The health problems for which the person takes the medications may also contribute to the risk of falls.

Be sure to talk with your doctor if you fall. A fall could be a sign of a new medical problem that needs attention, such as an infection or a cardiovascular disorder. It could also suggest that a treatment for a chronic ailment, such as Parkinson's disease or dementia, needs to be changed.



Source: <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/falls/causesandriskfactors/01.html>

HEALTH PROBLEMS THAT MAKE IT MORE LIKELY YOU WILL FALL

Stroke, Parkinson's disease and arthritis can affect your ability to move and make it more difficult to react quickly and save yourself in a **stumble**. What to do? Keep moving! Check out the different exercise/movement programs at the Senior Center.



Diabetes can cause unstable blood sugar levels which may make you feel faint. Diabetes can also cause problems with eyesight, and reduce feelings in the feet and legs. These make it more difficult to move around safely. What to do? Maintaining blood sugars within normal range through testing, medication and diet as prescribed by your medical provider.

Depression and dementia can make you less aware of your immediate surrounding and less able to react quickly. What to do? Talk to your medical provider.

Postural hypotension (low blood pressure) can make you light-headed, dizzy or unsteady when you stand up quickly. What to do? When getting out of bed, sit on the side of the bed dangling your feet and then get up slowly and stand for a few seconds before moving; check your blood pressure and talk with your medical provider.

Dizziness can make you very unsteady on your feet. What to do? Talk to your medical provider.

Incontinence (lack of control urinating/defecating) may cause falls due to hurrying to the bathroom or slipping on the wet floor especially at night. What to do? Talk with your medical provider, consider wearing an incontinence product, toilet every 2-3 hours, keep a urinal or commode by the bedside if getting up a lot at night is an issue.

Poor nutrition and not drinking enough fluids can cause fatigue, dizziness and decrease strength. What to do? Talk to your medical provider, Meals on Wheels, supplements.

Osteoporosis can make things worse. Thin, weak bones put you at greater risk for breaking a bone if you fall.

Source: *Don't fall for it; falls can be prevented* www.activeandhealthy.nsw.gov.au

An assessment is a useful tool that is often used to screen senior adults for risk factors for falling and identify the risk factors that warrant further attention. There are many types of assessment tools and they can be completed by a senior adult, a family member, a caregiver or a healthcare provider.



PERSONAL FALL ASSESSMENT

As we grow older, gradual health changes and some medications can cause falls, but many falls can be prevented. Use this to learn what to do to stay active, independent, and falls-free.

Check "Yes" if you experience this (even if only sometimes)	No	Yes	What to do if you checked "Yes"
Have you had any falls in the last six months ?			Talk with your doctor(s) about your falls and/or concerns. Show this checklist to your doctor(s) to help understand and treat your risks, and protect yourself from falls.
Do you take four or more prescription or over-the-counter medications daily?			Review your medications with your doctor(s) and your pharmacist at each visit, and with each new prescription. Ask which of your medications can cause drowsiness, dizziness, or weakness as a side effect. Talk with your doctor about anything that could be a medication side effect or interaction.
Do you have any difficulty walking or standing ? Do you shuffle when you walk ?			Tell your doctor(s) if you have any pain, aching, soreness, stiffness, weakness, swelling, or numbness in your legs or feet— don't ignore these types of health problems. Tell your doctor(s) about any difficulty walking to discuss treatment. Ask your doctor(s) if physical therapy or treatment by a medical specialist would be helpful to your problem.
Do you use a cane, walker, or crutches , or have to hold onto things?			Ask your doctor for a physical therapy referral to learn what type of device is best for you, and how to safely use it.
Do you use your arms to be able to stand up from a chair ?			Ask your doctor for a physical therapy referral to learn exercises to strengthen your leg muscles. Exercise at least two or three times a week for 30 min.
Do you ever feel unsteady on your feet, weak, or dizzy ?			Tell your doctor, and ask if treatment by a specialist or physical therapist would help improve your condition. Review all of your medications with your doctor(s) or pharmacist if you notice any of these conditions.
Has it been more than two years since you had an			Schedule an eye exam every two years to protect your eyesight and your balance.
Has your hearing gotten worse with age , or do your family or friends say you have a hearing			Schedule a hearing test every two years. If hearing aids are recommended, learn how to use them to help protect and restore your hearing, which helps improve and protect your balance.
Do you usually exercise less than two days a week ? (for 30 minutes total each of the days you exercise)			Ask your doctor(s) what types of exercise would be good for improving your strength and balance. Find some activities that you enjoy and people to exercise with two or three days/week for 30 min.
Do you drink any alcohol daily?			Limit your alcohol to one drink per day to avoid falls.
Do you have more than three chronic health conditions ? (such as heart or lung problems, diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, etc. Ask your doctor(s) if you are unsure.)			See your doctor(s) as often as recommended to keep your health in good condition. Ask your doctor(s) what you can do to stay healthy and active with your health conditions. Report any health changes that cause weakness or illness as soon as possible to your doctor.

The more "**Yes**" answers you have, the greater your chance of having a fall. **Be aware of what can cause falls, and take care of yourself to stay independent and falls-free! Call 860-448-4882 for more information on Fall Prevention**

Adapted from the Satellite Beach Fire Department *My Fall Free Plan*

YOU AND YOUR VISION

People with visual impairments are more than twice as likely to fall as people without visual impairments. Vision problems can increase the likelihood of a fall by decreasing the ability to detect obstacles and lessening stability. As we age, yearly eye exams are recommended to rule out macular degeneration, glaucoma and other vision problems. Directions for this assessment: People scoring 9 or higher should be encouraged to seek a vision evaluation from an optometrist or ophthalmologist.



QUESTION	YES	NO
1. Do you ever feel that problems with your vision make it difficult for you to do the things you would like to do?	1	0
2. Can you see the large print headlines in the newspaper?	0	1
3. Can you see the regular print in newspapers, magazines and books?	0	1
4. Can you see the numbers and names in a telephone directory?	0	1
5. When you are walking in the street, can you see the “walk” sign and street name signs?	0	1
6. When crossing the street, do cars seem to appear very suddenly?	1	0
7. Does trouble with your vision make it difficult for you to watch TV, play cards, do sewing, or any similar type of activity?	1	0
8. Does trouble with your vision make it difficult for you to see labels on medicine bottles?	1	0
9. Does trouble with your vision make it difficult for you to read prices when you shop?	1	0
10. Does trouble with your vision make it difficult for you to read your own mail?	1	0
11. Does trouble with your vision make it difficult for you to read your own handwriting?	1	0
12. Can you recognize the faces of family or friends when are across an average size room?	0	1
13. Do you have any particular difficulty seeing in dim light?	1	0
14. Do you tend to sit very close to the television?	1	0
15. Has a doctor ever told you that nothing more can be done for your vision?	1	0

Source: <http://www.envisionrehab.com>

CAN YOU HEAR ME?

People with a mild hearing loss are nearly three times more likely to have a history of falling. The risk is greater with greater hearing loss. When people can't hear well, they may not have a good awareness of their surroundings, increasing the chance of tripping and falling. One of the leading causes of falling is issues with balance, and one of the leading causes of balance problems is an unhealthy vestibular system (the balance system of the inner ear).



If you answer YES to two or more of these questions, you should make an appointment with an audiologist to have your hearing tested

QUESTION	YES	NO
1. Do you have a problem hearing over the telephone?		
2. Do you hear better through one ear than the other when you are on the telephone?		
3. Do you have trouble following the conversation with two or more people talking at the same time?		
4. Do people complain that you turn the TV volume up too high?		
5. Do you have to strain to understand conversation?		
6. Do you have trouble hearing in a noisy background?		
7. Do you have trouble hearing in restaurants?		
8. Do you have dizziness, pain, or ringing in your ears?		
9. Do you find yourself asking people to repeat themselves?		
10. Do family members or coworkers remark about your missing what has been said?		
11. Do many people you talk to seem to mumble (or not speak clearly)?		
12. Do you misunderstand what others are saying and respond inappropriately?		
13. Do you have trouble understanding the speech of women and children?		
14. Do people get annoyed because you misunderstand what they say?		

Source: www.asha.org/public/hearing/Self-Test-for-Hearing-Loss/#sthash.DYBAQ4eo.dpuf

BALANCE

Balance disorders can be due to many reasons so it is important to work with your physician to determine why you are having a problem. As we age strength weakens, poor posture or spinal stenosis make it harder to stand erect, arthritis can make it harder to move and low blood pressure or medications can lead to light-headedness.



Balance may be improved with exercises. If you have balance problems, ask your physician for a referral to Physical Therapy for an evaluation and treatment.

This is a simple assessment of your current balance that can be done at home.

DO NOT ATTEMPT DO THIS TEST ALONE, make sure that you have someone next to you to decrease the potential risk of falling.

Perform this Test Standing with a Counter Surface in Front of You:¹

1. Stand tall, wearing flat, closed shoes, with your arms folded across your chest. Keep your eyes open, focus on an object in front of you, raise one leg, bending the knee about 45 degrees, and start a stopwatch.
2. Remain on one leg, stopping the watch immediately if you uncross your arms, tilt sideways more than 45 degrees, move the leg you are standing on, or touch the raised leg to the floor.
3. Repeat this test with the other leg.
4. Compare your performance to normal results for various ages²:
 - 20 to 59 years old (28 to 29 seconds)
 - 60 to 69 years (27 seconds)
 - 70 to 79 years (15 seconds)
 - 80 and older (6 seconds)

¹ American Physical Therapy Association. ²COL Barbara A. Springer, PT, PhD, OCS, SCS; COL Raul Marin, MD; Tamara Cyhan, RN, BSN; CPT Holly Roberts, MPT, GCS; MAJ Norman W. Gill, PT, DSc, OCS, FAAOMPT; Normative Values for the Unipedal Stance Test with Eyes Open and Closed. Journal of Geriatric Physical Therapy: 2007.

FALLAPHOBIA

The fear of falling is real especially after a “bad” fall. Don’t let that fear restrict your activities. Talk to your physician about this fear. A combination of psychological and physical therapies can address this fear.



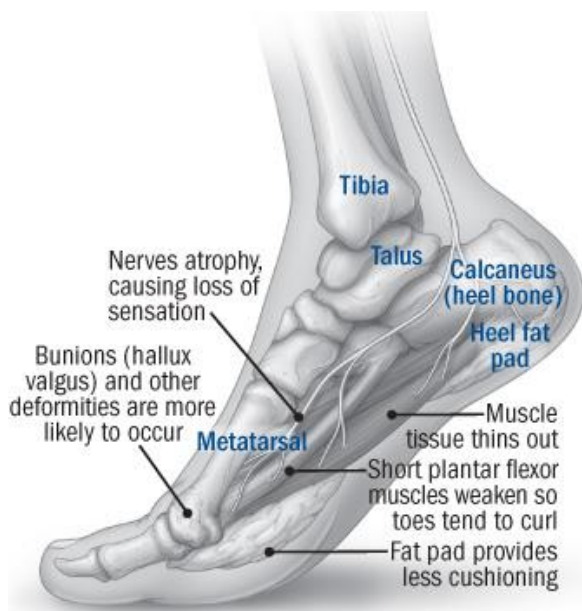
Answer the following questions and if you have a score greater than 70, please consider getting help.

What is your level of confidence doing these activities of daily living?	Score 1 = very confident 10 = not confident at all
1. Taking a bath or shower	
2. Reaching into cabinets or closets	
3. Walking around the house	
4. Preparing meals that does not require carrying heavy or hot objects	
5. Getting in and out of bed	
6. Answering the door or telephone	
7. Getting in and out of a chair	
8. Getting dressed and undressed	
9. Personal grooming (i.e. washing your face)	
10. Getting on and off of the toilet	
TOTAL SCORE	

Source: Tinetti, M., Richman, D., Powell, L. (1990). Falls Efficacy as a Measure of Fear of Falling. *Journal of Gerontology*. 45;239

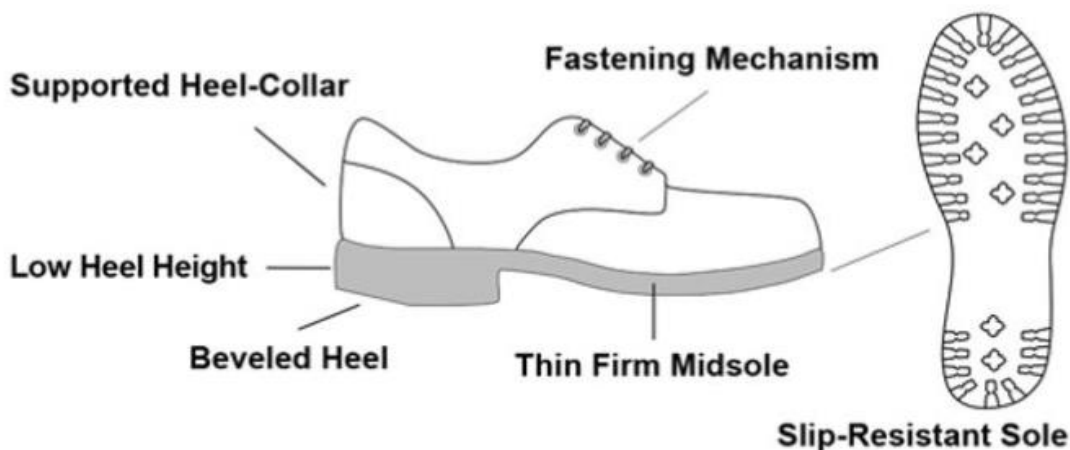
PUT YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD

As you can see from the illustration below, aging does cause changes to our feet. These changes can affect balance which is a falls risk. If you have any of these problems or foot pain, make an appointment with a podiatrist or your physician. Diabetics must pay particular attention to foot care and should have a podiatrist cut the toenails and treat any calluses or bunions. Keeping feet clean and dry is important in preventing infections.



Harvard Health Letter Nov. 2011

Wearing the correct shoes is important for comfort and safety. Elastic laces, Velcro fasteners and buckles can also be used.



P

• Physical Activity

The more active you are, the healthier you are physically and mentally. Physical activity can help reduce the risk of falling by strengthening your muscles and improving your flexibility. Research shows that doing balance and muscle-strengthening activities each week along with moderate-intensity aerobic activity, like brisk walking, can help reduce your risk of falling. In addition, the more physically active you are, the better you will be able to regain your balance if you do stumble. Last but not least, if you do take a fall, the fact that you have been physically active can help to minimize the health impacts of the fall and also speed your recovery.

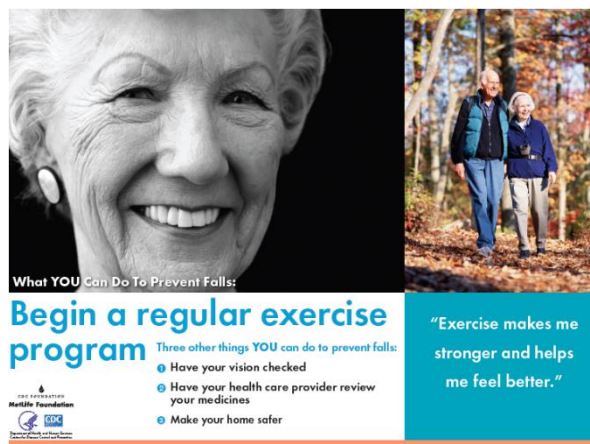
In addition to preventing falls, being physically active on a regular basis helps older adults to:

- Stay physically and mentally healthy.
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight.
- Move with less muscle soreness and joint stiffness.
- Sleep better and have more energy.
- Feel more relaxed and positive.
- Meet new people and have fun.
- Stay independent longer and enjoy retirement and life in general.

Source: <http://www.centre4activeliving.ca>

STAY PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

All of the local Senior Centers offer programs that promote physical activity. Check out your local Senior Center if you have not already done so! They offer many wonderful programs.



Below is an example of physical activities offered at the Groton Senior Center.

CLASS	ROOM	TIME	DAY(S)	FEE
FITNESS SUMMER SESSION July 7-August 29, 2014 / FALL SESSION Sept. 2- Oct 24, 2014				
CARDIO FIT	ER2	9AM	TUESDAY & THURSDAY	\$40
ARTHRITIS FOUNDATION	ER2	10:30AM	TUESDAY & THURSDAY	\$40
QIGONG / TAI CHI	ER1	5:30PM	WEDNESDAY	\$40
CARDIO SCULPT	ER2	9AM	MON., & FRI./ WED 9:15AM	\$52
HEART HEALTHY FITNESS	ER2	4-5PM	MON., WED., FRI.	\$72
STRETCH, STRENGTH & BALANCE	ER2	10:15AM	MON. WED., FRI.	\$52
EVENING STRENGTH TRAINING	ER2	5-6pm	MON., WED.	\$60
TAI CHI	ER1	2PM	TUESDAY	\$24
TAI CHI	ER1	10:00AM	THURSDAY	\$24
YOGA	ER2	8AM	WEDNESDAY	\$22
ZUMBA GOLD	ER2	11:45AM	WEDNESDAY	\$22
ZUMBA GOLD	ER2	5:00PM	TUESDAY	\$24
ZUMBA GOLD	ER2	5:00PM	THURSDAY	\$24
DANCE CLASSES				
LINE DANCING	ER1	10:30AM	MONDAY	\$30
LATIN LINE DANCING			NO SUMMER CLASSES	\$30 in Sept

EXERCISE GOOD SAFETY PRACTICES

Exercise Safety Tips to Always Consider Prior to Starting Exercise

Follow these EASY safety tips for when to start and stop exercise

- Always wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing and appropriate shoes for your activity.
- Warm up: Perform a low to moderate intensity warm-up for 5-10 minutes.
- Drink water before, during and after your exercise session.
- When exercising outdoors, evaluate your surroundings for safety: traffic, pavement, weather, and strangers.
- Wear clothes made of fabrics that absorb sweat and remove it from your skin.
- Never wear rubber or plastic suits. These could hold the sweat on your skin and make your body overheat.
- Wear sunscreen when you exercise outdoors.



Exercise Safety Tips for When to STOP Exercising

Stop exercising right away if you:

- Have pain or pressure in your chest, neck, shoulder, or arm.
- Feel dizzy or sick.
- Break out in a cold sweat.
- Have muscle cramps.
- Feel acute (not just achy) pain in your joints, feet, ankles, or legs.
- Slow down if you have trouble breathing. You should be able to talk while exercising without gasping for breath.

Exercise Safety Tips to Recognize When Exercise Should NOT be Started

- Avoid hard exercise for 2 hours after a big meal. (A leisurely walk around the block would be fine).
- Do not exercise when you have a fever and/or viral infection accompanied by muscle aches.
- Do not exercise if your systolic blood pressure is > than 200 and your diastolic is >100.
- Do not exercise if your resting heart rate is > 120.
- Do not exercise if you have a joint that you are using to exercise that is red and warm and painful.
- If you have osteoporosis, always avoid stretches that flex your spine or cause you to bend at the waist, and avoid making jerky, rapid movements.
- Stop exercising if you experience severe pain or swelling in a joint. Discomfort that persists should always be evaluated.
- Do not exercise if you have a new symptom that has not been evaluated by your health care provider such as pain in your chest, abdomen or a joint, swelling in an arm, leg or joint, difficulty catching your breath at rest, or a fluttering feeling in your chest.

Credit: www.easyforyou.info

Additional Safety Information: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/safety.html

GET MOVING and KEEP MOVING!



Walking: Walking is a perfect way to start exercising. It requires no special equipment, aside from a pair of comfortable walking shoes, and can be done anywhere.

Fitness Classes: Sign up for a fitness class at your local Senior Center, YMCA or fitness center. It keeps you motivated to exercise while also providing a source of fun, stress relief, and a place to meet friends.

Water Aerobics: Water aerobics and water sports a wonderful way to exercise because water reduces stress and strain on the body's joints.

Yoga: Yoga combines a series of poses with breathing and can be adapted to any level. Moving through the poses works on strength, flexibility and balance.

Tai Chi and Qi Gong: Tai Chi and Qi Gong are martial arts-inspired systems of movement that increase balance and strength. Classes for seniors are often available at your local YMCA or Senior Center.

Every day offers opportunities for physical activity: like gardening, cleaning the house, dancing, running after grandchildren and biking. There are also chair exercises for anyone who can't get up and move.

BALANCE EXERCISES

There are great exercises to improve your balance. Balance, just like anything we do, takes practice and when we build these balance exercises into our daily routine our balance improves. Here are some balance exercises you can try:

Good balance helps you walk safely and avoid tripping and falling over objects in your way.

Balance Walk



1. Raise arms to sides, shoulder height.
2. Choose a spot ahead of you and focus on it to keep you steady as you walk.
3. Walk in a straight line with one foot in front of the other.
4. As you walk, lift your back leg. Pause for 1 second before stepping forward.
5. Repeat for 20 steps, alternating legs.



As you progress, try looking from side to side as you walk, but skip this step if you have inner ear problems.

Heel-to-Toe Walk

Having good balance is important for many everyday activities, such as going up and down stairs.

1. Position the heel of one foot just in front of the toes of the other foot. Your heel and toes should touch or almost touch.
2. Choose a spot ahead of you and focus on it to keep you steady as you walk.
3. Take a step. Put your heel just in front of the toes of your other foot.
4. Repeat for 20 steps.



If you are unsteady on your feet, try doing this exercise near a wall so you can steady yourself if you need to.



You can do this exercise while waiting for the bus or standing in line at the grocery. For an added challenge, you can modify the exercise to improve your balance. (See *Progressing to Improve Balance* on page 68.)

Stand on One Foot



1. Stand on one foot behind a sturdy chair, holding on for balance.
2. Hold position for up to 10 seconds.
3. Repeat 10-15 times.
4. Repeat 10-15 times with other leg.
5. Repeat 10-15 more times with each leg.

Progressing to Improve Balance

As you progress, try adding the challenges shown below to help even more. For example, start by holding on to a sturdy chair with both hands for support. To challenge yourself further, try holding on to the chair with only one hand. As you feel steady, try using just one finger to balance you. Then, try balancing without holding on. When you are steady on your feet, try doing the exercises with your eyes closed.



Source: NIH Exercise & Physical Activity Guide

S

• Safety: inside & outside

Six out of every 10 falls happen at home, where we spend much of our time and tend to move around without thinking about our safety. Many falls could be prevented by making simple changes in your living areas, as well as personal and lifestyle changes.

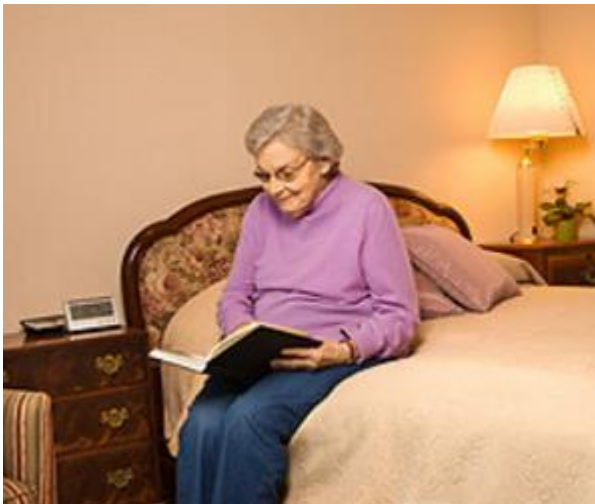
Take steps to "fall proof" your home, both inside and outdoors. **AIIM** to make your home safer.

- ☞ **A**void or remove safety hazards
- ☞ **I**mprove lighting
- ☞ **I**nstall handrails and grab bars
- ☞ **M**ove items to make them easier to reach.



PREVENTION TIPS FOR IMPROVING HOME SAFETY!

- **An important step toward preventing falls at home is to remove anything that could cause you to trip or slip while walking.** Tripping on clutter, small furniture, pet bowls, electrical or phone cords, or other things can cause you to fall. Slipping on rugs or slick floors can also cause falls.
- **Arrange furniture to give you plenty of room to walk freely.** Also remove items from stairs, hallways, and pathways.
- **Be sure that carpets are secured to the floor and stairs.** Remove throw rugs, use non-slip rugs, or attach rugs to the floor with double-sided tape
- **Put non-slip strips on floors and steps.** Put non-slip strips or a rubber mat on the floor of your bathtub or shower, as well. You can buy these items at a home center or hardware store.
- **At home and elsewhere, try to avoid wet floors and clean up spills right away.** Use only non-skid wax on waxed floors at home.
- **Be careful when walking outdoors, and avoid going out alone on ice or snow.** A simple slip on a slick sidewalk, a curb, or icy stairs could result in a serious injury.
- **During the winter, ask someone to spread sand or salt on icy surfaces.** Be sure to wear boots with good traction if you must go out when it snows. Better yet, don't take chances walking on icy or slippery surfaces.
- **Poor lighting- inside and outdoors- can increase your risk of falls.** Make sure you have enough lighting in each room, at entrances, and on outdoor walkways. Use light bulbs that have the highest wattage recommended for the fixture.
- **Good lighting on stairways is especially important.** Light switches at both the top and bottom of stairs can help.
- **Place a lamp within easy reach of your bed.**



- **Put night lights in the bathroom, hallways, bedroom, and kitchen.** Also keep a flashlight by your bed in case the power is out and you need to get up.
- **Have handrails installed on both sides of stairs and walkways.** If you must carry something while walking up or down stairs, hold the item in one hand and use the handrail with the other. Add a contrasting color strip on the bottom step. When you're carrying something, be sure you can see where your feet are stepping.
- **Properly placed grab bars in your tub and shower, and next to the toilet, can help you avoid falls, too.** Have grab bars installed, and use them every time you get in and out of the tub or shower. Be sure the grab bars are securely attached to the wall.
- **Poor lighting – inside and outdoors – can increase your risk of falls.** Make sure you have enough lighting in each room, at entrances, and on outdoor walkways. Use light bulbs that have the highest wattage recommended for the fixture.
- **Good lighting on stairways is especially important.** Light switches at both the top and bottom of stairs can help.
- **Place a lamp within easy reach of your bed.**
- **Put night lights in the bathroom, hallways, bedroom, and kitchen.** Keep a flashlight by your bed in case the power is out and you need to get up.
- **Have handrails installed on both sides of stairs and walkways.** If you must carry something while walking up or down stairs, hold the item in one hand and use the handrail with the other. When you're carrying something, be sure you can see where your feet are stepping.
- **Properly placed grab bars in your tub and shower, and next to the toilet, can help you avoid falls, too.** Have grab bars installed, and use them every time you get in and out of the tub or shower. Be sure the grab bars are securely attached to the wall.
- **You might find it helpful to rearrange often-used items in your home to make them more accessible.** Store food boxes, cans, dishes, clothing, and other everyday items within easy reach. This simple change could prevent a fall that might come from standing on a stool to get to an item.



Source: <http://www.nihseniorhealth.gov/falls/homesafety>

Backyard

- Motion sensor outdoor lighting
- Outdoor lighting for nighttime movement outside
- Backdoors 36" wide
- Handrails on stairs, both sides recommended
- Bright strips of tape on the stair edge for delineation
- 48" width sidewalks
- Well-trimmed landscaping and clear walkways
- No unstable stones or bricks in walk paths



This backyard could use many of the recommended safety features to reduce fall risks.

Courtesy of Buddy Cloud, SAFE Homes Program, Communities for a lifetime Section, Elder Rights Bureau, Department of Elder Affairs, Tallahassee, Florida

Front Entrance

- Front door 36" wide
- Zero step from front door
- Security peep holes
- Handrails on both sides of stairs
- Lighted doorbell
- Motion sensor outdoor lighting
- Trimmed landscaping and bushes
- Clear, clutter-free walkways, steps and paths
- 48" width sidewalks
- Address numbers that are visible and easy to read



This front entrance displays some of the recommended safety features. What is still missing?

Courtesy of Buddy Cloud, SAFE Homes Program, Communities for a Lifetime Section, Elder Rights Bureau, Department of Elder Affairs, Tallahassee, Florida

Living Room

- Furniture with sturdy back support and of adequate height where feet are able to touch the floor (easier to get in and out of)
- Electrical receptacles 24" above the floor
- Overhead lighting operated by a wall switch (rocker switch preferable)
- Tight-napped carpet or non-skid/non-glossy tile in all living areas (or a combination of both)
- Easy to read thermostat
- Non-slip backing or adhesive, double-sided tape to keep rugs secure – especially if positioned near seating



***There are both safe and hazardous features
in this room – can you identify all of them?***

Courtesy of Buddy Cloud, SAFE Homes Program, Communities for a Lifetime Section, Elder Rights Bureau, Department of Elder Affairs, Tallahassee, Florida

Kitchen

- Roll-out shelving or drawers for lower cabinets
- Pull-out cabinet type dishwasher
- D-looped cabinet drawers and door handles
- Overhead lighting operated by a wall switch
- Front controls on oven
- Side by side type refrigerator
- Roll-in trash can
- Low shelving for pantry – panel door for easy access
- Non-skid/non-glossy tile
- Sturdy ladder-type stool for reaching overhead
- Long grasper for retrieving light items overhead or on floor
- Non-slip backing or adhesive, double-sided tape to keep throw rugs secure from being a tripping hazard
- Night lights for approaching dark rooms safely

This beautiful kitchen lacks many of the safety features meant to lower risk of falls.



Courtesy of Buddy Cloud, SAFE Homes Program, Communities for a Lifetime Section, Elder Rights Bureau, Department of Elder Affairs, Tallahassee, Florida

Bathroom

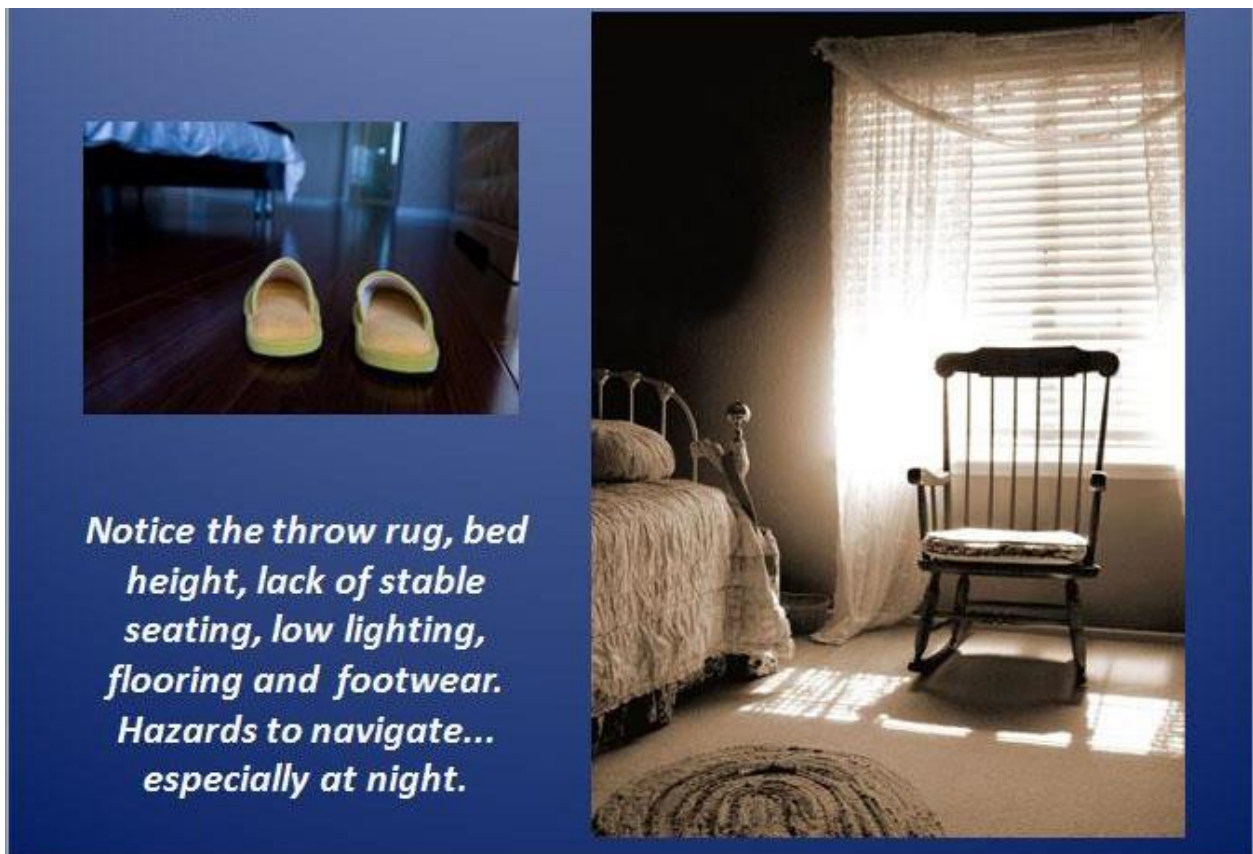
- Raised toilet seat (17" – 19")
- Non-skid/non-glossy tile
- D-shaped cabinet drawers and door handles
- Zero or low threshold into bathtub or shower
- Non-slip backing to keep rugs secure
- Non-skid mats in shower or bathtub
- Night light for night trips
- Shower chair and hand-held shower head
- Grab bars or handrails around the bathtub/shower and toilet to aid in getting up and maintaining balance



Courtesy of Buddy Cloud, SAFE Homes Program, Communities for a Lifetime Section, Elder Rights Bureau, Department of Elder Affairs, Tallahassee, Florida

Bedroom

- Wide interior doors: 30” standard, 32” better, 36” excellent
- Light switches with rocker switch
- Electrical receptacles 24” above the floor
- Night lights recommended for night trips to the bathroom
- Keep a charged flashlight near the bed for emergencies
- Keep a phone accessible so help is only a phone call away and consider an emergency medical alert system with remote activation
- Wall switch operated lighting
- Tight-napped carpet or non-skid/non-glossy tile in all living areas



Courtesy of Buddy Cloud, SAFE Homes Program, Communities for a Lifetime Section, Elder Rights Bureau, Department of Elder Affairs, Tallahassee, Florida

BATHROOMS

Many injuries due to falls occur in the bathroom due to hard and slippery surfaces. Research has shown too often seniors do not put in grab bars by the showers or toilets as they feel they look too institutionalized. Statistics show you will most likely end up on the floor if you don't put in assistive devices to hold onto for support when getting in and out of the shower or off of the toilet. Consider not locking the door so help can be provided if a fall does happen.

Some simple things that are not costly that can be done to help falls in the bathroom:

- ☞ Remove any throw rugs; if the floor is cold and a rug is needed be sure to have a non-skid rug.
- ☞ Brighten up the room with strong lights. If you get up at night, have strong nightlights.
- ☞ Pick up any clutter that you could trip over.
- ☞ Don't use bath oils as they can leave a film in the tub/shower making it slippery.
- ☞ Use a liquid soap instead of a soap bar which may cause you to bend over to chase the bar on the floor of the tub/shower.
- ☞ Use non-slip rubber bath mat in the tub/shower that has a suction cup backing and is a different color than the tub/shower floor.
- ☞ Keep the tub/shower clean of film.
- ☞ Install grab bars near the tub/shower and toilet.
- ☞ Hot water should be no greater than 120°F to avoid scalds.
- ☞ Install a hand held shower head so it easier to reach different parts of your body. Turning and bending over may put you at risk for falling.

These suggestions cost more money but may help to prevent falls.

- ☞ Shower chair for the shower/tub to sit in costs \$40 and up.
- ☞ Raised toilet seats start at \$40.
- ☞ If you have a bathtub/shower that is difficult to step into there are options available that can be very costly such as replacing the tub with a shower or Bathfitters which is less costly. An economical alternative is to consider a tubcuT© conversion. A certified tubcuT© installer can convert your bathtub to a

shower by cutting out a section of the side. The threshold is 4" above the floor giving you easier, safer access to your tub. If you save the cut out section of the tub it can be restored to its original condition. The average cost of this conversion is \$1000-\$1500. To find a certified installer 1-877-882-2887 (877-tubcuts) or go to www.tubcut.com.



Photo courtesy of Laura Castagna, Resident Services at Mystic River Congregate Housing

“After the cut out is complete, we put blue duct tape around the opening so the cut out section is defined clearly rather than having our residents trying to distinguish a white on white cut in the side of their tub.” Laura Castagna, Resident Services at Mystic River Congregate Housing

HOME MODIFICATIONS

Modifying homes to make them safer and accessible is one way to help seniors stay safely in their home. Changes can be low cost such as de-cluttering your home or moving your bedroom downstairs to more extensive such as putting in ramps or walk-in tubs.

Home owners should begin their search by discovering who is building in the area where they live. Below are some sources you might find helpful:

- Talk to friends, neighbors and relatives who have recently purchased a new home or had one built or remodeled.
- Local chapters of the **National Association of Home Builders**, which represents both home builders and remodelers, can provide names of companies who are members. **Call 860-859-3518.**
- Area real estate agents who are knowledgeable about and familiar with new home construction, can offer builders' names and insights into quality and customer satisfaction.



In Connecticut, all homebuilders must be registered with the Department of Consumer Protection (DCP) as New Home Construction Contractors (NHCC). All residential remodelers must be registered with the same state agency as Home Improvement Contractors ("HIC"). It is very important that consumers check with DCP to make sure the home builder's or remodeler's registration is current and applicable to the job to be undertaken, recognizing that some contractors are registered under both the NHCC and HIC programs. The general licensing number at DCP to call to check on registration status is 1- 860-713-6000 (in the Hartford area) or 1-800-842-2649.

More extensive information can be found at the Builders and Remodelers Association of Eastern Connecticut Inc. web site.

http://www.baec.net/pdf/select_reputable_builder.pdf

DEVICES TO HELP PREVENT FALLS

A cane or walker may help you feel more stable when you walk. Different types of canes are available. Some have grips made of foam or that fit the shape of your hand. Many canes can be adjusted, but some cannot.

A physical therapist can advise you about which cane to choose. Be sure the length fits you well. Your elbow should be slightly bent. A cane that's too short may make you unsteady. A cane that's too long is harder to use. If you use a cane, be sure to learn how to walk with it the right way. A physical therapist can help.

If you're at risk of falling, your physical therapist might suggest using a walker. A walker will help you stay balanced by giving you a wide base of support. Be sure to choose a walker that fits you and gives a level of stability that is best for you.

If you use a walker, be sure it's the right type and height for you. Also, learn to use it properly. A physical therapist can help you select the right walker and show you how to use it.

Four-wheeled walkers can be used if you don't need to put your weight on the walker for balance. Those with two tips and two wheels can roll, depending on where you place your weight. Walkers with tips only are quite common and will not roll.



A reacher, or grabber, can also help prevent falls. This simple tool lets you take lightweight items from high shelves and other places and pick up objects from the floor so you do not have to bend over. Use a reacher rather than standing on a stool to get something from above or bending down to pick up something from the floor.



Another helpful device is a portable telephone. Carry the phone with you from room to room. When it rings, you won't have to rush to answer it. Not rushing could avert a harmful fall.

Source: <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/falls/helpfuldevices/01.html>

MEDICAL ALERT SYSTEMS

Anyone living alone may want to consider a medical alert system that can be activated in the event of a fall or incident requiring help. Since the introduction of medical alert systems in the mid-1970's, the systems have become more advanced and some systems don't require the person to push a button for help. Instead the system is motion sensitive and can detect when the person has fallen.

In choosing a system that will be worn and used, Consumer Reports recommends looking for a medical alert system that meets all or most of these criteria:



- It is appropriate for the user, for example, a stroke survivor may need a device they can activate with one hand.
- It offers a choice of a wristband and/or neck pendant. Cords worn around the neck can pose a strangulation risk; wristbands may irritate those with skin ailments.
- It includes help buttons that can be wall-mounted near the floor in multiple rooms in case the user falls and isn't wearing the pendant.
- It offers multiple choices for whom to contact if you need help.
- It has a battery backup in case of a power failure.
- The base station can be contacted from anywhere on your property.
- The company has its own monitoring center, in the U.S. and employs its own trained emergency operators.
- The monitoring center has been certified by the Underwriters Laboratories (UL), a nonprofit safety and consulting company.
- Ask for quotes in writing. There are different fees based on type of phone service, contract, activation and cancellation.

Consumer Report published a comparison chart in June 2014 on the different types of systems available that can be found at:

www.consumerreports.org/content/cro/en/health/news-archive/z2014/June/shouldYouBuyAMedicalAlertSystem.print.html

FALLS ARE PREVENTABLE

WALK LIKE A PENGUIN ON ICY SURFACES!



<http://www.ehs.wisc.edu/walk-like-a-penguin.htm>

- Dress warmly and if possible with a bulky coat to help cushion you if you should fall.
- Keep warm but don't cover up to the point that it is difficult to see or hear.
- Wear something bright like a scarf or reflective so drivers can see you walking.
- If you really are afraid of falling, carry a little bag of snow melt or kitty litter to put down as you walk. Just make sure it isn't too heavy as it will affect your balance.
- Wear sunglasses, especially if it is sunny, as the snow's glare can make it hard to see ice.
- Ski poles or canes with an ice pick on the end can help with balance.
- Wear proper footwear with good grip. Do not wear boots or shoes with plastic or leather soles. Ice grippers, such as Yaktrax, that go over footwear can help you walk on hard packed snow and ice. But be careful! Grippers become dangerously slippery and must be removed before walking on smooth surfaces such as stone, tile and ceramic. Before buying the grippers, be sure that you are able to attach and remove them from your boots, this is best done sitting down.
- Pay attention to where you are walking. Look for iced areas and if possible, walk around them. If you have a choice, walk on the southern side of the path. North-facing spots stay icy longer.
- Take your time! Walk slower so you have time to react if you feel a change in traction.
- Hold onto available railings for balance especially going up and down steps. Plant your feet firmly on each step.

- Keep your feet apart at least a foot for a wide base of support. This helps to keep your balance.
- Bend your knees slightly as you walk if the area is really slippery. This will help to keep the center of gravity closer to the ground which helps to stabilize your body.
- Waddle like a penguin! Avoid an erect, marching posture. Keep the center of gravity over your front leg. Make the step small, placing your whole foot down at once. Then shift your weight very slowly to this foot and bring your other foot to meet it the same way.
- When you step on icy areas, take short steps, curl your toes under and walk as flatfooted as possible.
- Keep your hands out of pockets and by your side to provide balance. Do not carry heavy loads that may cause you to become off balance.
- When walking down a slippery slope, walk sideways, but do not cross one foot over the other. Bend your knees slightly.
- Before you step off the curb, make sure oncoming cars and trucks have come to a complete stop. Due to poor road conditions, motorists may not be able to stop at traffic signals or slow down for pedestrians who have the right of way.
- When getting out of your vehicle, look down at the surface. If it's coated with ice you might want to park in a different place.
- Use special care when entering or exiting vehicles. Use the vehicle for support. Before standing brace yourself with the vehicle door and seat back. This will give you some stability.
- Walking over a slippery floor can be just as dangerous as walking over ice! Keep these tips in mind if you are entering a building:
 - Remove as much snow and water from your boots as you can. Water from melting ice on the floor can lead to slippery conditions.
 - Notice that floors and stairs may be wet and slippery—walk carefully especially by outer doors.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU DO FALL

Whether you're at home or somewhere else, a sudden fall can be startling and upsetting. If you do fall:

- ☞ Stay as calm as possible. Take several deep breaths to try to relax.
- ☞ Remain still on the floor or ground for a few moments. This will help you get over the shock of falling.



- ☞ Decide if you are hurt before getting up. Getting up too quickly or in the wrong way could make an injury worse. If you think you are hurt, call 911.
- ☞ Be sure to discuss any fall with your doctor. Write down when, where, and how you fell so you can discuss the details with your doctor. The doctor can assess whether a medical issue or other causes of the fall needs to be addressed. Knowing the cause can help you plan to prevent future falls.
- ☞ After a fall, your doctor might refer you to other health care providers who can help prevent future falls. A physical therapist can help with gait, balance, strength training, and walking aids. An occupational therapist can suggest changes in your home that may lower your risk of falls.

Source: [http:// www.nihseniorhealth.gov/falls/homesafety](http://www.nihseniorhealth.gov/falls/homesafety)

ACCIDENTS HAPPEN!

Even if you are careful and have fall-proofed your home, accidents happen and you might have to call 911 due to a fall. Here are some suggestions on how to prepare for the ambulance and crew coming to your home.

First and foremost, carry a portable phone around the house and especially out in the yard so you can call for help in case of an accident, sudden illness or chest pain. When you call 911 the dispatcher needs to know who you are, where you are and what is going on so they can deploy the nearest ambulance.

If you have pain, hit your head or fell a distance try not to move until the EMTs/paramedics can do an assessment. You could do more damage by trying to move.

If you are not alone, have your family, friend or neighbor do the following to help the ambulance crew get to you quickly.

- Figure out the best way for the ambulance crew can get to you. Your family, friend or neighbor should move any obstacles inside and outside as well as move vehicles that will be in the way of the ambulance.
- If it is dark, lights should be turned on and the door unlocked.
- Ask someone to move furniture and roll up any throw rugs that might be in the way.
- Telephone family or friends to meet you at the hospital.
- If possible, have someone outside to direct the ambulance crew where to park and enter.
- Have medications or a medication list available for the EMTs/paramedics.
- Let the EMTs/paramedics know allergies, medical issues and recent surgeries.
- Identification and insurance information will be needed at the hospital.
- If you live alone ask a trusted family member, friend or neighbor to lock up your house. Have them hold the keys or take them with you.
- Once the EMT/paramedics arrive, everyone should stay out of the way as they attend to you.

How to Get Up From the Floor by Yourself

- Calm down.
- Check your body.
- If you are injured, call for help. Stay warm.
- If you are not hurt, look for a sturdy piece of furniture, like a chair.



1) Roll onto your side.



2) Crawl over to a chair or sturdy furniture.



3) From a kneeling position, put your arms up onto the seat of the chair.



4) Bring one knee forward and put that foot on the floor.



5) Push up with your arms and legs, pivot your bottom around.



6) Sit down. Rest before trying to move.

Let your health care provider know after you have had a fall.



"Don't fall for it. Falls can be prevented!" State Government of South Australia. 2004. Copyright Commonwealth of Australia. Reproduced by permission.

MEDICAL INFORMATION

Please consider filling out the Medical Information on this page and keep it handy. The form was designed by Doug LoPresti and Colleen Atkinson from Critical Skills with input from the Lyme-Old Lyme Senior Center members.

Name: _____

Address: _____

DOB: _____ SSN: _____

Contact Name: _____

Contact Phone: _____

Medications:

Pertinent Medical History:

Allergies:



Critical Skills Education & Training
860-304-8471

LEDGE LIGHT HEALTH DISTRICT CAN HELP

If you have recently fallen or have concerns about fall risks in your home, please call Ledge Light Health District to request a home safety evaluation by our staff or Medical Reserve Corps volunteers. They have been trained to identify fall risks and make recommendations. This is a free, confidential community service to help keep seniors safe in their home.

Seniors Standing Strong



- Have you had a fall recently?
- Are you more than 65 years old?
- Do you take more than 3 medications?
- Is walking becoming harder?
- Do you have problems getting to the toilet on time?
- Do you have trouble with your vision?
- Are you afraid of having a fall?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may be at risk of falling. Luckily, most falls are preventable.

Contact Ledge Light Health District for a FREE in-home falls prevention evaluation. Call: 860-448-4882!



FALLS PREVENTION COALITION
COMMUNITY PARTNERS WORKING
TOGETHER TO KEEP YOU STANDING STRONG

d533848

Thank you to our Falls Prevention Coalition Members who have donated their time and expertise to the coalition to help decrease the incidence of falls in our communities.

American Ambulance
Backus Hospital
CT Department of Public Health Region 4 EMS Coordinator
East Lyme Senior Center
Fort Hill Medical Supply
Fort Hill Pharmacy
Groton Senior Center
Independence Physical Therapy
Ledge Light Health District Medical Reserve Corps
L+M Hospital
Mystic River Ambulance
Mystic River Homes Congregate Housing
Nutmeg Building and Remodeling, LLC.
Old Mystic Fire Department
Senior Resources
Southeast Mental Health Association
Thames Valley Council for Community Action: TVCCA-RSVP
VNA Southeast Connecticut
Waterford Senior Center