

Falls and Older Adults

Many people have a friend or relative who has fallen. The person may have slipped while walking or felt dizzy when standing up from a chair and fallen. Maybe you've fallen yourself.

If you or an older person you know has fallen, you're not alone. More than one in three people age 65 years or older falls each year. The risk of falling -- and fall-related problems -- rises with age.

Falls can lead to fractures, trauma

Each year, more than 1.6 million older U.S. adults go to emergency departments for fall-related injuries. Among older adults, falls are the number one cause of fractures, hospital admissions for trauma, loss of independence, and injury deaths.

Fractures caused by falls can lead to hospital stays and disability. Most often, fall-related fractures are in the person's hip, pelvis, spine, arm, hand, or ankle.

Fear of falling

Many older adults are afraid of falling. This fear becomes more common as people age, even among those who haven't fallen. It may lead older people to avoid activities such as walking, shopping, or taking part in social activities.

If you're worried about falling, talk with your doctor or another health care provider. Your doctor may refer you to a physical therapist. Physical therapy can help you improve your balance and walking and help build your walking confidence. Getting rid of your fear of falling can help you to stay active, maintain your physical health, and prevent future falls.

Tell your doctor if you fall

If you fall, be sure to discuss the fall with your doctor, even if you aren't hurt. Many underlying causes of falls can be treated or corrected. For example, falls can be a sign of a new medical problem that needs attention, such as diabetes or changes in blood pressure, particularly drops in blood pressure on standing up. They can also be a sign of problems with your medications or eyesight that can be corrected. After a fall, your doctor may suggest changes in your medication or your eyewear prescription. He or she may also suggest physical therapy, use of a walking aid, or other steps to help prevent future falls. These steps can also make you more confident in your abilities.

Ways to prevent falls

Exercise to improve your balance and strengthen your muscles helps to prevent falls. Not wearing bifocal or multifocal glasses when you walk, especially on stairs, will make you less likely to fall. You can also make your home safer by removing loose rugs, adding handrails to stairs and hallways, and making sure you have adequate lighting in dark areas.

Falls are not an inevitable part of life, even as a person gets older. You can take action to prevent falls. Your doctor or other health care providers can help you decide what changes will help.

What to do If You 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.

How to get up from a fall

1. Remain still on the floor or ground for a few moments. This will help you get over the shock of falling.
2. Decide if you're hurt before getting up. Getting up too quickly or in the wrong way could make an injury worse.
3. If you think you can get up safely without help, roll over onto your side.
4. Rest again while your body and blood pressure adjust. Slowly get up on your hands and knees, and crawl to a sturdy chair.
5. Put your hands on the chair seat and slide one foot forward so that it is flat on the floor. Keep the other leg bent so the knee is on the floor.
6. From this kneeling position, slowly rise and turn your body to sit in the chair.

If you're hurt or can't get up on your own, ask someone for help or call 911. If you're alone, try to get into a comfortable position and wait for help to arrive.

Consider Medical Response Devices

If you have problems with balance or dizziness, be sure to discuss these with your doctor. If you are

often alone, and at increased risk of falling, consider getting a personal emergency response system. This service, which works through your telephone line, provides a button or bracelet to wear at all times in your home.

If you fall or need emergency assistance for any reason, a push of the button will alert the service. Emergency medical services will be called. There is a fee for medical monitoring services, but it may be worth the cost.

Carrying a portable phone with you as you move about your house could make it easier to call someone if you need assistance. You might also put a telephone in a place that you can reach from the floor in case you fall and need help.

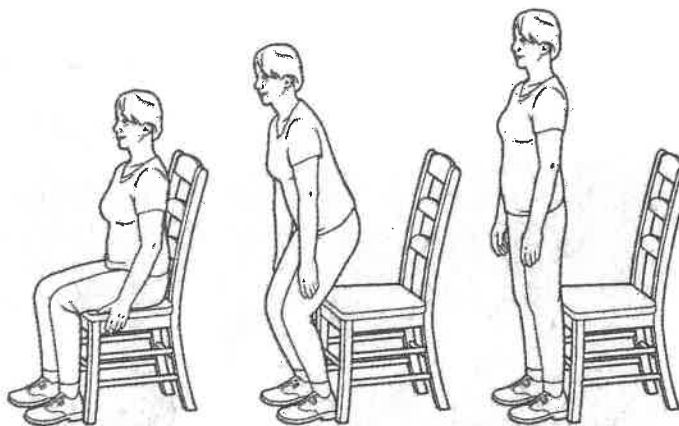
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Chair Rise Exercise

What it does: Strengthens the muscles in your thighs & buttocks.

Goal: To do this exercise using your hands as you become stronger.

How to do it:

1. Sit toward the front of a sturdy chair with your knees bent & feet flat on the floor.
2. Rest your hands lightly on the seat on either side of you, keeping your back & neck straight & chest slightly forward.
3. Breathe in slowly. Lean forward & feel your weight on the front of your feet.
4. Breathe out & slowly stand up, using your hands as little as possible.
5. Pause for a full breath in & out.
6. Breathe in as you slowly sit down. Do not let yourself collapse back down into the chair. Rather, control your lowering as much as possible.
7. Breathe out.

Repeat 10-15 times. If this number is too hard for you when you first start practicing this exercise, begin with fewer & work up to this number.

Rest for a minute & then do a final set of 10-15.



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