

Fall Prevention

Important facts to know

This handout give important information that everyone should know about falls. Ask your health care provider if you have any questions.

Facts About Falls

- More than 1/3 of adults age 65 years and older fall each year.
- 50% of adults over 80 years old fall each year.
- More than 40% of those injured during a fall are admitted to the hospital.
- About 50% of those who fall do so more than one time a year.
- 40% of elders who fall more than once a year require admission to nursing homes.



Talk with your health care provider about ways to help prevent falls.

How serious are falls?

- Among older adults, falls are the leading cause of injury deaths.
- Falls are the most common cause of non-fatal injuries that require hospital admission for trauma.
- 95% of hip fractures in older adults are caused by falls.
- Falls are the leading cause of traumatic brain injury.

Am I at risk?

Yes, you are at risk if you have:

- A history of falls
- Muscle weakness
- Impaired balance
- Problems with walking or are using a cane or walker



Ask your doctor what kind of exercise would be good to help improve your strength and balance.

What can I do to lower my risk of falling?

- **Get regular exercise.** Staying strong and keeping active can decrease your risk of falling. If you are unsure how to start, University of Washington Medical Center's Physical Therapy department's Strong and Steady Program can help you.
- **Keep your home safe.** Loose throw rugs, poor lighting, and clutter on the floor are a few things that can cause falls.
- **Review medicines with your health care provider.** Taking more than 4 medicines has been shown to increase your risk for falls.
- **Get your vision checked.** Poor vision increases fall risk. Regular check-ups ensure that your prescription is correct and that you are not developing conditions such as glaucoma or cataracts.
- **Wear proper shoes.** Shoes should cover the heel, tie snugly, have a supportive and somewhat rigid sole or insole, and be non-slip on the bottom. Avoid wearing slippers and slip-on shoes.

Falls-Free Plan

As we grow older, gradual health changes and some medicines can cause falls, but many falls can be prevented. Use the checklist on pages 3 and 4 to learn what to do to stay active, independent, and falls-free.

Check “Yes” if you have this (even if only sometimes)

What to do if you checked “Yes”

<p>Have you had any falls in the last 6 months?</p>	<p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Talk with your doctor(s) about your falls and concerns. 2. Show this checklist to your doctor(s) to help understand and treat your risks, and protect yourself from falls.
<p>Do you take 4 or more prescription or over-the-counter medicines daily?</p>	<p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review your medicines with your doctor(s) and your pharmacist at each visit, and with each new prescription. 2. Ask which of your medicines can cause you to feel drowsy, dizzy, or weak as a side effect. 3. Talk with your doctor about anything that could be a medicine side effect or interaction.
<p>Do you have any difficulty walking or standing?</p>	<p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell your doctor(s) if you have any pain, aching, soreness, stiffness, weakness, swelling, or numbness in your legs or feet. Do not ignore these problems. 2. Tell your doctor(s) about any difficulty walking, to discuss treatment. 3. Ask your doctor(s) if physical therapy or treatment by a medical specialist would be helpful for your problem.
<p>Do you use a cane, walker, or crutches, or have to hold onto things when you walk?</p>	<p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask your doctor for training from a physical therapist to learn what type of device is best for you, and how to use it safely.
<p>Do you have to use your arms to be able to stand up from a chair?</p>	<p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask your doctor for a physical therapy referral to learn exercises to strengthen your leg muscles. 2. Exercise at least 2 or 3 times a week for 30 minutes.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

For appointments, call weekdays between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.:

- 8-East Physical Therapy: 206-598-4830
- Roosevelt Exercise Training Center: 206-598-2888

Appointments are scheduled daily between 8:15 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Do you ever feel unsteady on your feet, weak, or dizzy?	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell your doctor and ask if treatment by a specialist or physical therapist would help improve your condition. 2. Review all of your medicines with your doctor(s) or pharmacist if you notice any of these conditions.
Has it been more than 2 years since you had an eye exam?	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Schedule an eye exam every 2 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 problem?	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Schedule a hearing test every 2 years. 2. 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 2 days a week (for 30 minutes total each of the days you exercise)?	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask your doctor(s) what types of exercise would be good for improving your strength and balance. 2. Find some activities that you enjoy and people to exercise with 2 or 3 days a week for 30 minutes.
Do you drink any alcohol daily?	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Limit your alcohol to 1 drink a day to avoid falls.
Do you have more than 3 chronic health conditions? (such as heart or lung problems, diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, etc.)? Ask your doctor(s) if you are unsure.	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. See your doctor(s) as often as recommended to keep your health in good condition. 2. Ask your doctor(s) what you should do to stay healthy and active with your health conditions. 3. Report any health changes that cause weakness or illness as soon as possible.

This list is adapted from *Stay Active and Independent for Life: An Information Guide for Adults 65+*, published by Washington State Department of Health April 2006. Visit www.doh.wa.gov/hsqa/emstrauma/injury/pubs/SAILguide.pdf.