

Lower Your Risk of a Fall

More than one-third of adults 65 and older fall each year. Among older adults, falls are the leading cause of serious injury. Falling is considered the most preventable cause of needing nursing home placement. Because most falls occur in and around the home, a look at your own personal situation can tell you a bit about your level of risk. Many common health problems and home hazards that contribute to a greater risk of falling, but the risk can be minimized.

Persons who have difficulty with walking, take certain medications or multiple medications, have foot problems or unsafe footwear, have vision issues or tripping hazards in their home, and/or who have blood pressure issues when getting up (syncope), are considered at higher risk of falling. Persons who have more than one of these risk factors multiply their risk of sustaining a fall. For example, if you have one of these problems, your risk of falling is 1 in 10, if you have three of these problems, your risk of falling is 4 in 10, and if you have four of these problems your risk jumps to 6 in 10.

The good news is that many of these risk factors can be minimized. The three main strategies for minimizing fall risk are: engaging in physical activity for strength and balance, managing medical/medication issues, and home modification. For example, if you have difficulty with walking, you can use physical activity to improve strength and flexibility. Ask your doctor for a referral to a physical therapist for guidance with transfers and exercises. After checking with your doctor, join a fitness class that is designed to improve balance and strength.

There are many ways to modify your home to maximize safety. Add grab bars near the toilet or in the shower in the bathroom. Create clear paths for walking from room to room. Clean up spills quickly and don't wax the floor. Use non-skid rugs and increase lighting in all living areas. Use a nightlight for nighttime trips to the bathroom. If you are unsure what to do, review a copy of this [Home Safety Checklist](#) for ideas.

Our In-Home Fix-it program has volunteers available to install grab bars, smooth out a threshold, or install lightbulbs in hard to reach places. For more complex and expensive modifications; you may be eligible for a small grant from the [Sudbury Housing Trust](#) or a low interest loan from the [Home Modification Loan program](#).

Your doctor or pharmacist can provide guidance on medical issues or medication side effects that affect balance and walking. Make sure to let the doctor know about any symptoms, such as muscle weakness or lightheadedness that could affect your stability. Sometimes doctors or pharmacists may suggest a different timetable for taking your medicine. Certain chronic conditions are associated with an increased risk of falls, including: Parkinson's disease, arthritis, irregular heartbeat, or having had a stroke.

Cataracts and other eye diseases can diminish vision and make a fall more likely. [MAB Community Services](#) has a Low Vision Specialist available for a home visit. The Low Vision Specialist can provide ideas and resources for continuing to safely navigate your home.

Lastly, pay attention to your footwear. Footwear that is soft and lacking in support may increase the likelihood of a fall. Invest in sturdy, properly sized footwear to maintain your stability while walking.

The Senior Center has information and programs to assist you in preventing falls. Call us for a free copy of a home safety checklist. Visit us for fitness programs, such as Fit for the Future, tap dance, walking club and the Balance and Flexibility class that can help you to maintain your strength and balance. Contact Debra Galloway at (978) 443-3055 or at gallowayd@sudbury.ma.us for more information about fall prevention and home modification.

Sources: VNA Private Care: LifeWeaving newsletter
Aetna Intellihealth, www.intelihealth.com
Fall Prevention Center for Excellence, California, www.stopfalls.org

Risk Factors for Falling

1. Difficulty with walking
2. Certain medications, multiple medications
3. Foot problems, unsafe footwear
4. Vision issues
5. Tripping or slipping hazards at home or outside the home
6. Blood pressure issues/lightheadedness/syncope/irregular heartbeat
7. Certain chronic medical conditions (Parkinson's disease, arthritis, stroke)

Strategies for Minimizing Risk

1. Engaging in physical activity to increase strength and balance
2. Managing medical and medication issues
3. Home modification to reduce potential hazards