



Care Partner Information

Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Falls

Falls are very common. One out of three older adults will fall each year. Falls can be very serious. They can cause broken bones, like hip fractures, bruises, and head injuries. A fall can also make it hard to walk or move, which can take away an older adult's independence. People who fall are often afraid of falling again. Sometimes this fear can cause older adults to be less active, or to shuffle their feet when they walk. This can weaken muscles and make it more likely the older adult will fall again.

Tips for Preventing Falls

Most falls in older adults are caused by many things. These include some medications and balance problems. Most of the time it takes several changes to prevent falls. The table below lists some changes to prevent falls. These tips can help even if the older adult has not fallen in the past. You might not know if someone you care for has fallen. About half of older adults who fall don't report it. Using these tips with everyone is best.

Changes with Aging and What to Do	
Exercise	Encourage physical activity. Include exercises that help with balance and strength. Most local Area Agencies on Aging offer fall prevention programs.
Strong Bones	Talk to a healthcare provider about calcium and vitamin D treatment for the older adult. Also ask about getting checked for osteoporosis.
Foot Care	Foot pain, long nails, and numb or burning feet can cause falls. Wear shoes in the home.
Eye Care	Poor vision can cause falls. See an eye doctor at least once a year. Wear glasses if needed.
Medications	Some medications can cause dizziness, weakness, and poor balance. Taking multiple medications also increases risk. Talk with the healthcare provider.
Changing Positions	Many people get light-headed when standing up. Change positions slowly. Give the person time to adjust.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

Change the environment

Making some changes at home will also help to reduce fall risk.

Environment	Improvements that can prevent falls
Lighting	Indoor and outdoor lighting should be bright. Use night lights in hallways and bathrooms, and light switches near chairs and beds.
Flooring	Remove or adjust loose rugs so they cannot bunch or slide. Check carpet to be sure it is installed correctly. Repair any cracks in the floor. Avoid shiny or slippery hard surfaces. Use surfaces with a rough finish.
Bathrooms	Put in handrails by the toilets and in bathtubs or showers. Place suction cup mats on bathtub or shower floors. Use floor mats that have a rubber backing. Consider using a shower seat.
Stairs	When possible, limit the older adult's living to the main floor. If stairs are used, install weight-bearing hand rails on both sides of staircases just below elbow height. Also make sure all stairways are well lit and that any carpet is secure on every step.
Furniture	Bed handles can be installed on bed frames to assist older adults to get in and out of bed. Chairs should have arm rests that are sturdy and extend to the front of the seat cushion to be used as support when standing. Chairs should not be so low that hips are below the knees when sitting.
Canes and walkers	Many older adults use a cane or walker to help with balance, but do not use it properly. This can increase their fall risk. Older adults who fall while using a cane or walker are more likely to get hurt. Physical therapists can help with the selection of a cane or walker. They can assist with fit and provide education on proper use.
Clutter	Pick up clutter to ensure walkways are as wide as possible and no tripping hazards, especially in hallways and stairways.

Falls in older adults are common and serious. Older adults should talk with their primary care provider to learn about their risk of falling. Together they can make a plan to prevent falls and remain independent.

Useful Websites

Fall Prevention Center of Excellence: <http://stopfalls.org/>

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