



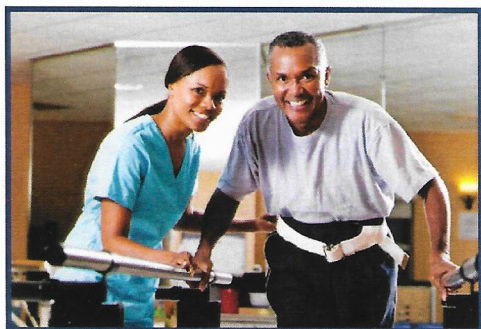
Be Safe: Prevent Falls

Healthy Living Message

What's Important to Know?

Falls cause the most fractures and are the leading cause of injury deaths among older adults. About half of all falls happen at home, and there are practical things you can do to reduce your risk of falling there. Engaging in regular physical activity, monitoring or avoiding certain medications, and getting your eyes checked may reduce your risk of falling. Other things you can do to prevent falls are:

- Remove small throw rugs to prevent tripping and falling. If you choose to use them, anchor them with double-sided tape or anti-slip mats underneath.
- Improve the lighting in your home. As you get older, you need brighter lights to help you see well. Hang light-weight curtains or shades to reduce glare.
- Wear shoes inside and outside the house. Avoid going barefoot or wearing slippers.
- Remove things (papers, books, clothes, shoes) from stairs and places where you walk, so you will be less likely to trip. Install handrails and lights in all staircases.
- Keep items you use often in cabinets that you can reach easily without using a step stool.



- Install grab bars next to your toilet and in your tub or shower. Make sure you use non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors
- Use a walker or a cane for extra support.
- Physical activity, especially balance training exercises, may reduce your risk of falling by increasing strength and balance. Lack of physical activity leads to weakness and increases your chances of falling.

Want to Know More?

If you want to learn more about how to prevent falls, talk with your VA health care team. They can also help if you have questions about making a healthy living change. For more information go to the VHA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention: www.prevention.va.gov/Healthy_Living/Be_Safe_Prevent_Falls.asp

Resources

- VHA National Center for Health Promotion & Disease Prevention: www.prevention.va.gov. Go to the Healthy Living tab and choose "Be Safe"
- Veterans Health Library: www.veteranshealthlibrary.va.gov, search "Preventing Falls"
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Injury Prevention and Control - Prevent Falls in Older Adults: www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/index.html

What actions can I take to prevent falls?

- Use good lighting in all rooms. Replace any light bulbs that burn out.
- Keep items that you use often in easy-to-reach places.
- Set up your furniture so you have a clear path. Avoid moving your furniture.
- **Do not** have throw rugs or other things on the floor that can make you trip.
- Avoid walking on wet floors.
- If any of your floors are uneven, fix them.
- Add color or contrast paint or tape to clearly mark and help you see:
 - Grab bars or handrails.
 - First and last steps of staircases.
 - Where the edge of each step is.
- If you use a stepladder:
 - Make sure that it is fully opened. **Do not** climb a closed stepladder.
 - Ask someone to hold the stepladder while you use it.
- Know where your pets are when moving through your home.

What can I do in the bedroom?

- Make sure that you have a light by your bed that is easy to reach.
- **Do not** use any sheets or blankets for your bed that hang to the floor.
- Have a firm chair with side arms that you can use for support when you get dressed.

What can I do in the kitchen?

- If you need to reach something above you, use a step stool with a grab bar.
- Keep electrical cords out of the way.
- **Do not** use floor polish or wax that makes floors slippery.

What can I do with my stairs?

- **Do not** leave any items on the stairs.
- Make sure that you have a light switch at the top and the bottom of the stairs.
- Make sure that there are handrails on both sides of the stairs.
- Install nonslip stair treads on all your stairs.
- Choose a carpet that does not hide the edge of the steps on the stairs.
- Check carpeting to make sure that it is firmly attached to the stairs.

What other actions can I take?

- Wear shoes that:
 - Have a low heel. **Do not** wear high heels. Feel good on your feet & fit well.
 - Are closed at the toe and have rubber bottoms.
- Use tools that help you move around if needed: canes, walkers, scooters.
- Review your medicines with your doctor. Some medicines can make you feel dizzy. This can increase your chance of falling.