

Simple steps to help prevent falls

Falls can be scary, and it may feel like there's nothing you can do to keep yourself safe. But falls aren't inevitable, and you can take steps to help prevent them.

Important facts about falls

If you or someone you know has fallen, you're not alone. Each year, millions of older adults fall. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:¹

- More than 1 out of 4 older adults fall each year, but less than half tell their healthcare provider
- 20% of falls cause a serious injury, such as broken bones or a head injury
- Many people who fall become afraid of falling again, which may make them less active
- Most falls are caused by a combination of risk factors, many of which are modifiable

Could you be at risk of falling?

1

Have you fallen in the past year?

2

Do you feel unsteady when standing or walking?

3

Do you worry about falling?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you may be at an increased risk of falling. Many things can cause a fall. The factors listed below may increase your risk:³

- Poor vision and/or hearing
- Certain health conditions
- Taking medications
- Muscle weakness
- Problems with balance and gait
- Postural hypotension
- Safety hazards
- Foot problems or improper footwear

Humana[®]

Y0040_GHHKLP3EN_C

[Humana.com](https://www.humana.com)



Most of the time, falls don't "just happen." They are often avoidable, and taking the right steps can help you prevent them.

1 Work with your healthcare provider

Your healthcare provider can help assess your risk of falling and give you more tools to help you stay safe.

Be prepared to discuss your:^{3,4}

- **Medicines.** Make a list of all the medications and supplements you're taking—both prescription and over-the-counter ones—and bring it with you to every appointment. Your provider can review your medications and help you learn about risky side effects and drug interactions that may increase your risk of falling.
- **Fall history.** Try to write down the details of each fall you've experienced, including when, where and how it happened. You can also discuss examples of when you almost fell but were caught by someone or managed to grab onto something. These details can help your provider give you personalized fall-prevention strategies.
- **Health status.** Talk to your healthcare provider about your conditions and your comfort level when walking. If you feel dizziness, joint pain, shortness of breath, or numbness in your feet and legs, tell your provider.

In some cases, your provider may refer you to a physical therapist. Some types of physical therapists—called vestibular physical therapists—are specially trained in issues regarding balance and inner ear.

2 Stay physically active

Exercise helps reduce the risk of falls by improving strength, balance, coordination and flexibility.⁴ Consider activities like walking, water workouts and tai chi. Some exercise classes are specifically designed to help you build balance and prevent falls.

Talk to your healthcare provider about the best type of exercise program for you. If your fear of falling is preventing you from being active, tell your healthcare provider.

3 Remove home hazards

Falls can happen anywhere, but most occur at home. Making simple changes to make your home safer may help prevent falls.

- **Assess your home.** Look for possible fall hazards in or around your home using the chart on the next page.
- **Act now.** Remove or repair hazards and consider additional safety measures like canes, walkers or grab bars.

4 Wear functional footwear

Changing your footwear may help prevent falls. Make sure your shoes fit you properly and have these characteristics:³

- **Nonskid.** Your shoes should have nonskid, rubber soles that aren't too thick or too thin. Never walk in slippery footwear including socks and slippers.
- **Low-heeled.** Avoid high heels and floppy shoes. Heels can make you feel less steady, and floppy shoes may be a tripping hazard.
- **Supportive.** Your shoes should be firm, sturdy and fully support your feet.

Removing home hazards

Area of home	Action steps
Floors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep floors free of clutter (paper, books, towels, boxes, etc.) • Remove rugs or add double-sided tape or a nonslip backing • Tape cords and wires from lamps and telephones next to the wall • If you have to walk around furniture to walk through a room, ask someone to move it so the path is clear
Stairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put up handrails on both sides • Have an electrician put in an overhead light and light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs • Make sure carpet is firmly attached to every step or remove carpet and attach nonslip rubber treads instead • Remove any clutter (e.g. paper, shoes, books or other objects) from the stairs • Fix any broken or uneven steps • Add strips of contrasting colors (e.g. tape to the edges) to help you see your stairs better
Kitchen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean up spills as soon as they happen • If you must use a step stool, get one with a handrail (never use a chair as a stool) • Try to place items that you use often on lower shelves
Bathrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put a nonslip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub or shower • Put up grab bars inside the tub or shower and next to the toilet • If you are unsteady on your feet, use a shower seat and a handheld shower head to bathe
Bedrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place lamps on either side of the bed where they are easy to reach • Use a nightlight between the bed and the bathroom • Keep a flashlight with fresh batteries in your bedside table • Put your phone within arm's reach of your bed in case you need help in the middle of the night
Outside the home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put in motion-sensor lights or dark-to-dawn lights • Keep your porch, deck, walkways and driveway free of leaves, snow, trash and clutter • Cover steps with a gritty, weather-proof paint and install handrails on both sides • If you live in an area that gets snow and ice, ask someone to sprinkle salt or sand on slippery steps and sidewalks

5 Have your vision and hearing checked

It's important to have your vision and hearing checked annually. Even small changes in your vision and hearing may cause a fall.³

If you need glasses or contacts, be sure to wear them when needed. Ask your optometrist if your eyeglasses need to be updated during your annual eye exam.

If you have a hearing aid, wear it. Make sure it fits well. Talk to your healthcare provider if you think you need one.

6 Be mindful of fall threats outside

Outdoor falls are often caused by uneven sidewalks, curbs and slippery surfaces.

These tips may help:⁵

- **Always look ahead at your path.** Watch for things like cracks, holes and uneven areas.
- **Navigate uneven surfaces carefully and slowly.** Be especially careful in grassy areas.
- **Be extra careful in inclement weather.** Rain, snow and ice can make surfaces extremely slippery, and the slick spots are difficult to see.
- **Look for the curb cut.** This is the dip in the curb near corners. If you walk with a cane or walker, or you worry about stepping down from a curb, this can be particularly useful.
- **Only walk in well-lit areas in the evening.** Look for areas with plenty of light and consider using a flashlight and wearing a reflective vest.

Notes

References

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/adultfalls.html

²Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/steady/index.html

³National Institute on Aging

www.nia.nih.gov/health/prevent-falls-and-fractures

⁴Mayo Clinic

www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/healthy-aging/in-depth/fall-prevention/art-20047358

⁵National Council on Aging

www.ncoa.org/blog/falls-prevention-community-5-point-checklist-navigating-neighborhood/

This is for informational purposes only and does not replace treatment or advice from a healthcare professional. If you have questions, please talk with your doctor. Talk to your doctor before beginning an exercise program or making any changes to your diet.