

Staying Steady on Your Feet



Falls are NOT a normal part of aging. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than one out of four older people falls each year, but less than half tell their doctor. Falling one time doubles your chances of falling again. Through the falls prevention programs, practical lifestyle adjustments, and accessing available resources in the community, people can significantly reduce the number of falls and prevent falls from occurring.

FALL PREVENTION RESOURCES

- **Talk to your doctor:** Your primary care provider can address concerns you have about falling including:
 - Reviewing medications that may increase your risk of falling
 - Finding ways to help you resume or improve your physical activity
 - Referrals to UVM Medical Center's Fall Prevention Clinic or a Home Health Agency
- **Contact the Falls Free Vermont Coalition:** A group committed to helping older Vermonters, family members, and medical providers to utilize networks of community partners and resources to support people to age with dignity and grace.
 - Phone: (802) 863-7596
 - Website: www.fallsfreevermont.org
- **Call the Vermont Senior Helpline:** The helpline can provide you with resources and programs to support your health and independence.
 - Phone: (800) 642-5119
- **Visit the CDC's STEADI Website:** The Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths and Injuries (STEADI) website has additional fall prevention materials.
 - Website: www.cdc.gov/steady/



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Check for Safety

A Home Fall Prevention Checklist for Older Adults

FALLS AT HOME

Each year, thousands of older Americans fall at home. Many of them are seriously injured, and some are disabled. Annually, over 27,000 people aged 65 and older die and nearly 2.8 million are treated in emergency departments because of falls.

Falls are often due to hazards that are easy to overlook but easy to fix. This checklist will help you find and fix those hazards in your home.

The checklist asks about hazards found in each room of your home. For each hazard, the checklist tells you how to fix the problem. At the end of the checklist, you'll find other tips for preventing falls.

FLOORS: Look at the floor in each room.

Q: When you walk through a room, do you have to walk around furniture?

- ☐ Ask someone to move the furniture so your path is clear.

Q: Do you have throw rugs on the floor?

- ☐ Remove the rugs or use double-sided tape or a non-slip backing so the rugs won't slip.

Q: Are there papers, books, towels, shoes, magazines, boxes, blankets, or other objects on the floor?

- ☐ Pick up things that are on the floor. Always keep objects off the floor.

Q: Do you have to walk over or around wires or cords (like lamp, telephone, or extension cords)?

- ☐ Coil or tape cords and wires next to the wall so you can't trip over them. If needed, have an electrician put in another outlet.

STAIRS AND STEPS:

Look at the stairs you use both inside and outside your home.

Q: Are there papers, shoes, books, or other objects on the stairs?

☐ Pick up things on the stairs. Always keep objects off stairs.

Q: Are some steps broken or uneven?

☐ Fix loose or uneven steps.

Q: Are you missing a light over the stairway?

☐ Have an electrician put in an overhead light at the top and bottom of the stairs.

Q: Do you have only one light switch for your stairs (only at the top or at the bottom of the stairs)?

☐ Have an electrician put in a light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs. You can get light switches that glow.

BEDROOMS: Look at all your bedrooms.

Q: Is the light near the bed hard to reach?

☐ Place a lamp close to the bed where it's easy to reach.

Q: Has the stairway light bulb burned out?

☐ Have a friend or family member change the light bulb.

Q: Is the carpet on the steps loose or torn?

☐ Make sure the carpet is firmly attached to every step, or remove the carpet and attach non-slip rubber treads to the stairs.

Q: Are the handrails loose or broken? Is there a handrail on only one side of the stairs?

☐ Fix loose handrails or put in new ones. Make sure handrails are on both sides of the stairs and are as long as the stairs.



Q: Is the path from your bed to the bathroom dark?

☐ Put in a night-light so you can see where you're walking. Some night-lights go on by themselves after dark.



KITCHEN: Look at your kitchen and eating area.

Q: Are the things you use often on high shelves?

- ☐ Move items in your cabinets. Keep things you use often on the lower shelves (about waist level).

Q: Is your step stool unsteady?

- ☐ If you must use a step stool, get one with a bar to hold on to. Never use a chair as a step stool.



BATHROOMS: Look at all your bathrooms.

Q: Is the tub or shower floor slippery?

- ☐ Put a non-slip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub or shower.

Q: Do you need some support when you get in and out of the tub or up from the toilet?

- ☐ Have grab bars put in next to and inside the tub and next to the toilet.



Other Safety Tips

- ☐ Keep emergency numbers in large print near each phone.

- ☐ Put a phone near the floor in case you fall and can't get up.

- ☐ Think about wearing an alarm device that will bring help in case you fall and can't get up.

Other Things You Can Do to Prevent Falls

- ☐ Do exercises that improve your balance and make your legs stronger. Exercise also helps you feel better and more confident.



- ☐ Have your doctor or pharmacist look at all the medicines you take, even over-the-counter medicines. Some medicines can make you sleepy or dizzy.
- ☐ Have your eyes checked by an eye doctor at least once a year and update your glasses.
- ☐ Get up slowly after you sit or lie down.
- ☐ Wear shoes both inside and outside the house. Avoid going barefoot or wearing slippers.
- ☐ Improve the lighting in your home. Put in brighter light bulbs. Florescent bulbs are bright and cost less to use.
- ☐ It's safest to have uniform lighting in a room. Add lighting to dark areas. Hang lightweight curtains or shades to reduce glare.
- ☐ Paint a contrasting color on the top edge of all steps so you can see the stairs better. For example, use a light color paint on dark wood.

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**Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention**
National Center for Injury
Prevention and Control

For more information, contact:
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1 (800) CDC-INFO (232-4636)
www.cdc.gov/steady

Take Action:



Falls aren't just a normal part of getting older—they're preventable and there are simple steps you can take to stay independent longer.



Speak Up.

Talk openly with your doctor about fall risks and prevention.

- Tell your doctor right away if you have fallen, or if you're afraid you might fall, or if you feel unsteady.
- Work together and review all of your medications and discuss any side effects like feeling dizzy or sleepy.
- See if taking vitamin D supplements for improved bone, muscle, and nerve health is right for you.



Keep Moving.

Activities that strengthen your legs and help your balance (like Tai Chi) can help you prevent falls.



Check Your Eyes.

Have your vision checked once a year and update your glasses as needed.



Make Your Home Safe.

Most falls happen at home.

- Keep your floors clutter free.
- Remove small rugs or tape down or secure them.
- Add grab bars in the bathroom.
- Have handrails and lights installed on all staircases.
- Make sure your home has lots of light.

RESOURCES

CDC:
cdc.gov/homeandrecreationsafety/falls/adultfalls.html

STEADI Initiative:
cdc.gov/steadi

STEADI Patient Materials:
cdc.gov/steadi/patient.html

National Council on Aging Falls Prevention (NCOA):
ncoa.org/healthy-aging/falls-prevention/



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Check Your Risk of Falling

Please circle "Yes" or "No" for each statement below.			Why it matters
Yes (1)	No (0)	I have fallen in the past year.	People who have fallen once are likely to fall again.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I use or have been advised to use a cane or walker to get around safely.	People who have been advised to use a cane or walker may already be more likely to fall.
Yes (1)	No (0)	Sometimes I feel unsteady when I am walking.	Unsteadiness or needing support while walking are signs of poor balance.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I steady myself by holding onto furniture when walking at home.	This is also a sign of poor balance.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I am worried about falling.	People who are worried about falling are more likely to fall.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I need to push with my hands to stand up from a chair.	This is a sign of weak leg muscles, a major reason for falling.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I have some trouble stepping up onto a curb.	This is also a sign of weak leg muscles.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I often have to rush to the toilet.	Rushing to the bathroom, especially at night, increases your chance of falling.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I have lost some feeling in my feet.	Numbness in your feet can cause stumbles and lead to falls.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I take medicine that sometimes makes me feel light-headed or more tired than usual.	Side effects from medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I take medicine to help me sleep or improve my mood.	These medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I often feel sad or depressed.	Symptoms of depression, such as not feeling well or feeling slowed down, are linked to falls.
Add up the number of points for each "yes" answer. If you scored 4 points or more, you may be at risk for falling. Discuss this brochure with your doctor.			

This checklist was developed by the Greater Los Angeles VA Geriatric Research Education Clinical Center and affiliates and is a validated fall risk self-assessment tool (Rubenstein et al. J Safety Res; 2011:42(6)493-499). Adapted with permission of the authors.



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