



Prevent Falls: What you can do

Prevent falls before they happen

Falls can be a serious health risk, especially for older adults. Keeping your body as strong and flexible as possible, and making your surroundings safe, are the best ways to reduce the risk of injury from falls.

Make your home safe

Most people tend to fall in their own homes. There are many things you can do to help make your home safer for you and those around you.

- Keep shoes, bags, books, papers, pet toys, and other objects off the floor and out of walkways.
- Never use a chair as a step stool. Instead, use safety step stools or ladders with bars on the side to hold onto and nonskid tread surfaces.
- Place a nonslip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the tub or shower floor.
- Remove throw rugs, or use tape and nonslip backing so the rugs stay in place and edges stay flat.
- Move furniture so that your path through a room is clear.
- Coil or tape wires and cords to the base of the wall.
- Place lamps and light switches where they can be easily reached in the dark.
- Fix loose, broken, or uneven steps.
- Fix loose handrails or put in new ones where needed.

Keep your bones healthy

Most adults over the age of 50 need 1,200 mg of calcium and 1,000 to 2,000 IU of vitamin D (preferably vitamin D3) every day in order to keep bones strong. Many diets do not provide enough calcium and vitamin D. If you are not getting enough, supplements can help. Your doctor can help you choose which supplements are best for you.

Many falls can be prevented

Take these steps to lower your chances of falling:

- Make your home safer.
- Stay as physically active as you can.
- Have your health care team review your medicines.
- Have your vision and hearing checked.

Stay physically active

Aim for 150 minutes of physical activity a week. That equals 30 minutes on all or most days to keep your bones and muscles strong, and your joints flexible.

Even if you have difficulty standing or walking or are using a wheelchair, there are exercises and physical activities you can still do to improve your health and physical ability.

If you are worried about falling or you have questions about physical activity or exercises, talk with your health care team about what they recommend.

Review your medicines

Some prescription and over-the-counter medicines or a combination of them can make you sleepy or dizzy. This can make you more likely to fall. Discuss your medicines with your doctor at your next visit.

Check your blood pressure

Do you feel light-headed, dizzy, or faint when you stand up too quickly after lying down or sitting? This could be a sign that your blood pressure drops when you change positions. Try to sit or stand up slowly to prevent a fall, and have your blood pressure checked.



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Have your vision checked

Small changes in your vision can make you less stable.

- Get tested for common problems like glaucoma or cataracts that can limit your vision.
- Schedule routine eye exams with your eye doctor.

If you use glasses or contacts, your eye doctor can check your prescription to make sure it has not changed.

Have your hearing checked

Changes in your hearing can also put you at higher risk for a fall. If you have not had your hearing checked, and you think you may have some hearing loss, ask your doctor for a referral for a hearing evaluation. You can also go to kphearingcenters.com to take an online **Hearing Health Quiz**. If you have a hearing aid, we recommend having it checked at a Kaiser Permanente Hearing Center to make sure it is working properly.

Consider aids to keep you stable

Use a walking stick, cane, or walker to help you feel steadier when you walk. This is very important when you're walking in areas you don't know well or in places where the walkways are uneven. Be very careful when walking on wet or icy surfaces.

Fill up your social calendar

When you keep busy, you are less likely to become lonely or depressed. People who are depressed are more likely to fall and get injured than those who are not depressed.

Find things you enjoy doing with others. Try visiting with friends and family, join a club or religious group, or volunteer your time to help others—and lower your risk of a fall. If you think you are depressed, let your health care team know. Treatment options are available.

Other safety tips

- Carry a cell phone and keep your emergency contact numbers with you at all times, and next to your phones at home.
- Use the buddy system, especially if you live alone and are less steady than you used to be. Arrange to have a neighbor or friend come by to check on you.
- Use a medical alert service. The service provides you with a bracelet or necklace with a button to alert the system if you fall or need emergency help.

Know your resources

Many resources at Kaiser Permanente and in your community can help you be safe in your home and live more independently as you age. Contact the Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center near you for classes, programs, books, and videos on fall prevention and other health topics.

Go to kp.org/mydoctor where you can watch a short video called “Preventing Falls” or review the “Checklist for Preventing Falls at Home.”

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. Some photos may include models and not actual patients.