



## Patient education: Preventing falls (The Basics)

[Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate](#)

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### Am I at risk of falling?

Your risk of falling increases as you grow older. That's because getting older can make it harder to walk steadily and keep your balance. Also, the effects of falls are more serious in older people.

Overall, 3 to 4 out of every 10 people over the age of 65 fall each year. Up to 75 percent of people who fracture a hip never recover to the point they were before they had their fracture. If you have fallen in the past, you are at higher risk of falling again.

Several things can increase your risk of a fall, including:

- Illness
  - A change in the medicines you take
  - An unsafe or unfamiliar setting (for example, a room with rugs or furniture that might trip you, or an area you don't know well)
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### How can my doctor help me to avoid falling?

Your doctor can talk to you about the following things:

- Past falls – It is important to tell your doctor about any times you have fallen or almost fallen. He or she can then suggest ways to prevent another fall.
- Your health conditions – Some health problems can put you at risk of falling. These include conditions that affect eyesight, hearing, muscle strength, or balance.

- The medicines you take – Certain medicines can increase the risk of falling. These include some medicines that are used for sleeping problems, anxiety, high blood pressure, or depression. Adding new medicines, or changing doses of some medicines, can also affect your risk of falling.

The more your doctor knows about your situation, the better he or she will be able to help you. For example, if you fell because you have a condition that causes pain, your doctor might suggest treatments to deal with the pain. Or if one of your medicines is making you dizzy and more likely to fall, your doctor might switch you to a different medicine.

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## Is there anything I can do on my own?

Yes. To help keep from falling, you can:

- Make your home safer – To avoid falling at home, get rid of things that might make you trip or slip. This might include furniture, electrical cords, clutter, and loose rugs ( [figure 1](#)). Keep your home well-lit so that you can easily see where you are going. Avoid storing things in high places so you don't have to reach or climb.
- Wear sturdy shoes that fit well – Wearing shoes with high heels or slippery soles, or shoes that are too loose, can lead to falls. Walking around in bare feet, or only socks, can also increase your risk of falling.
- Take vitamin D pills – Taking vitamin D might lower the risk of falls in older people. This is because vitamin D helps make bones and muscles stronger. Your doctor can talk to you about whether you should take extra vitamin D, and how much.
- Stay active – Exercising on a regular basis can help lower your risk of falling. It might also help prevent you from getting hurt if you do fall. It is best to do a few different activities that help with both strength and balance. There are many kinds of exercise that can be safe for older people. These include walking, swimming, and Tai Chi (a Chinese martial art that involves slow, gentle movements).
- Use a cane, walker, and other safety devices – If your doctor recommends that you use a cane or walker, be sure that it's the right size and you know how to use it. There are other devices that might help you avoid falling, too. These include grab bars or a sturdy seat for the shower, non-slip bath mats, and hand rails or treads for the stairs (to prevent slipping).

If you worry that you could fall, there are also alarm buttons that let you call for help if you fall and can't get up.

## What should I do if I fall?

If you fall, see your doctor right away, even if you aren't hurt. Your doctor can try to figure out what caused you to fall, and how likely you are to fall again. He or she will do an exam and talk to you about your health problems, medicines, and activities. Then he or she can suggest things you can do to avoid falling again.

Many older people have a hard time recovering after a fall. Doing things to prevent falling can help you to protect your health and independence.

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[Patient education: Osteoporosis \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Bone density testing \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Calcium and vitamin D for bone health \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Vitamin D deficiency \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Hip fracture \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Osteoporosis prevention and treatment \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Bone density testing \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Calcium and vitamin D for bone health \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

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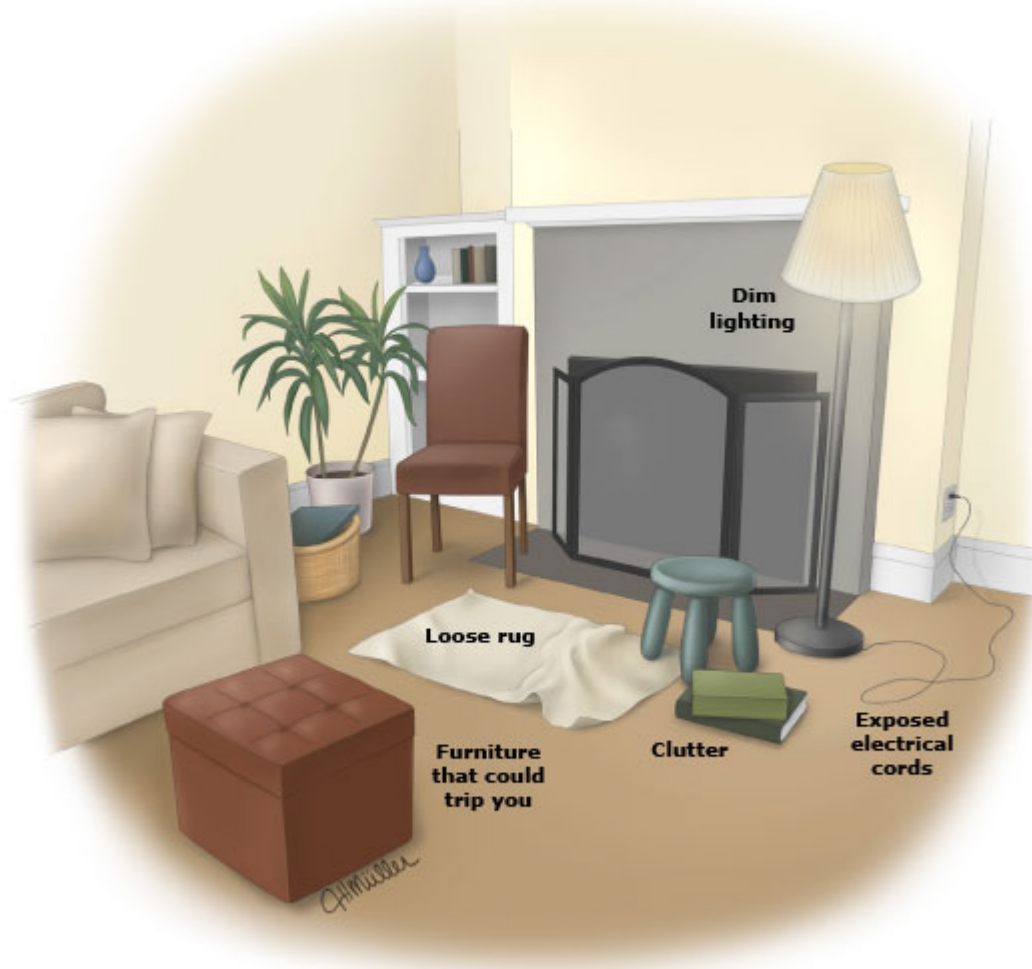
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## GRAPHICS

### How to avoid falling at home

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This picture shows some of the things that can cause a fall in your home. Look around and remove any loose rugs, electrical cords, clutter, or furniture that could trip you.

Graphic 72890 Version 1.0

