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SENIOR SAFETY NEWS

ANNOUNCING SENIOR SAFETY BOOKLETS!

We have designed new Safety Awareness booklets for seniors living in senior housing facilities and for seniors living at home in their communities.

They stress awareness in avoiding hazards lurking in living areas whether at home or in a housing facility. Subjects covered include avoiding falls and fires, as well as, prescription management. We feel prescriptions can, in many cases, lead to falls and fires.

These are free and everybody is welcome to use them. If you are reading this in your browser, you can download and print the safety booklets here:

- [For seniors at home](#)
- [For seniors in housing facilities](#)

NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY AWARENESS

We are beginning to hear from people in the community who are responsible for the safety of their people. We have been emailed and have spoken with many of you who are looking for tools to keep your neighbors aware.

We welcome your ideas and are willing to work with you in designing posters, 'personalizing' our booklets and posters for you or helping you with problems you encounter.

We believe that ongoing 15 to 30 minute seminars covering specific topics in combination with posters used as reminders is the best way to keep people aware and safe.

Seminars are wonderful for churches, senior centers, retiree clubs and union locals. Everybody in the community gets involved.

BALANCE PROBLEMS

Causes and Prevention

People are more likely to have problems with balance as they get older. But age is not the only reason these problems occur; there are other causes, too. In some cases, you can help reduce your risk for certain balance problems.

Have you ever felt dizzy, lightheaded, or as if the room were spinning around you? These can be very troublesome sensations. If the feeling happens often, it could be a sign of a balance problem. Balance problems are among the most common reasons that older adults seek help from a doctor.

Some balance disorders are caused by problems in the inner ear. Others may involve another part of the body, such as the brain or the heart. Aging, infections, head injury, certain medicines, or problems with blood circulation may result in a balance problem.

The part of the inner ear that is responsible for balance is the labyrinth. When the labyrinth becomes infected or swollen, often through an ear infection such as otitis media, it can cause dizziness and loss of balance. This condition is called labyrinthitis.

Upper respiratory infections and other viral infections, as well as stress, fatigue, allergies, smoking, or alcohol use, also can increase the risk for labyrinthitis.

Balance problems can also result from taking certain medications. For example, some medicines, such as those that help lower blood pressure, can make a person feel dizzy. Ototoxic drugs are medicines that damage the inner ear. Sometimes the damage lasts only as long as you take the drug; other times it is permanent. Some antibiotics are ototoxic. If your medicine is

ototoxic, you may feel off balance. Check with your doctor if you notice a problem while taking a medication.

Diseases of the circulatory system, such as stroke, also can cause dizziness and other balance problems. Smoking, high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease increase the risk of stroke. Low blood pressure also can cause dizziness to occur.

Your diet and lifestyle can help you manage certain balance-related problems. By eating low-salt or salt-free foods, and steering clear of caffeine and alcohol, you can make its symptoms less severe. Balance problems due to high blood pressure can be managed by eating less sodium, maintaining a healthy weight, and exercising.

Also, get a flu shot every year to stave off respiratory infections. If you still get an ear infection, see a doctor immediately before it becomes more serious.

Do you take medication? If so, ask your doctor if your medicine is ototoxic, or damaging to the ear. Ask if other drugs can be used instead. If not, ask if the dose can be safely reduced. Sometimes it cannot. However, your doctor will help you get the medicine you need while trying to reduce unwanted side effects.

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GETTING A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

Being older doesn't mean you have to feel tired all the time. There are many things you can do to help you get a good night's sleep. Here are some ideas.

- Follow a regular schedule. Go to sleep and get up at the same time each day, even on weekends. Napping in the late afternoon or evening may keep you awake at night.
- Develop a bedtime routine. About 30-45 minutes before bedtime each night, do the same things so your body will know that it's time to sleep. Some people watch television, read a book, listen to soothing music, or soak in a warm bath.
- Your bedroom should be dark, not too hot or too cold, and as quiet as possible.
- Be sure you have a comfortable mattress, a pillow you like, and enough blankets for the season.
- Exercise at regular times each day but not within 3 hours of your bedtime.
- Make an effort to get out side in the sunlight each day.
- Be careful about when and how much you eat. Large meals close to bedtime may keep you awake, but a light snack in the evening can help you get a good night's sleep.
- Stay away from caffeine late in the day. Caffeine (found in coffee, tea, cola, and hot chocolate) is a stimulant that can keep you awake.
- Drink less liquid in the evening. Waking up to go to the bathroom and turning on a bright light breaks up your sleep.
- Remember that alcohol won't help you sleep. Even small amounts make it harder to stay asleep.
- Use your bedroom only for sleeping. After turning off the light give yourself about 15 minutes to fall asleep. If you're still awake and not drowsy, get out of bed. When you feel sleepy, go back to bed.



Safe Sleeping

Try to set up a safe and restful place to sleep. Make sure there are smoke alarms on each floor and lock up the house before going to bed. Other ideas for a safe night's sleep are:

- Keep a telephone with emergency phone numbers by your bed.
- Have a good lamp that turns on easily within reach.
- Put a glass of water next to the bed.
- Use nightlights in the bathroom and hall.
- Don't smoke, especially in bed.
- Remove area rugs so you won't trip if you get out of bed in the middle of the night.
- Don't fall asleep with a heating pad on; it may burn.

Sweet Dreams

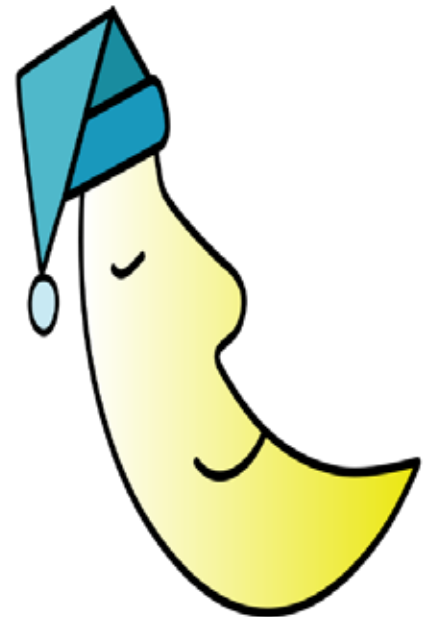
There are some tricks to help you fall asleep.

You don't really have to count sheep—just try counting slowly to 100. Some people find that playing mental games makes them sleepy—tell yourself it's 5 minutes before you have to get up and you're just trying to get a few extra winks.

Other people find that relaxing their body puts them to sleep. You might start with your toes, and tell yourself that your toes are relaxed and sleepy. Work your way up the rest of the body saying the same words. You may drift off to sleep before getting to the top of your head.

If you feel tired and unable to do the things you usually do for more than 2-3 weeks, see a doctor. Sleep problems can cause you to feel bad, but there are changes you can make to get a better night's sleep

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FALLS AND OLDER ADULTS

Preventing Falls and Fractures

Falls and fractures are not an inevitable part of growing older. Many can be prevented. To reduce your risk of falls and fractures, you can

- make personal changes that involve your lifestyle or physical well-being
- make changes in your home
- consider using walking aids or other assistive devices
- take steps to maintain or improve your bone health.

Talk with your doctor about how to prevent falls at home and elsewhere.

Preventing Falls and Fractures – Personal Changes

Many falls result from personal or lifestyle factors that can be changed. Your doctor can assess your risk of falling and suggest ways to prevent falls. At your next check-up, talk with your doctor about your risk of falling and changes you might make. Also, let your doctor know if you've fallen or almost fallen. You might be referred to another health care provider who can help, such as a physical therapist.

Here are some changes you might make.

- Be physically active.
- Have your medicines reviewed.
- Have your blood pressure checked when lying and standing.
- Get a vision check-up. Avoid multifocal glasses when walking.
- Choose safe footwear.

Be Physically Active

Regular physical activity is a first line of defense against falls and fractures. Physical activity strengthens muscles and increases flexibility and endurance. Your balance and the way you walk may improve with exercise, decreasing the chances of a fall. It's important to keep muscles strong. Strengthening muscles in the lower body can improve balance. Work with your doctor or a physical therapist to plan a physical activity program that is right for you.

A supervised group program can help with balance and gait training. Strength and balance exercises done at home can also reduce your risk of falls. This will help improve your balance and strength.



Tai Chi is one type of exercise that may help prevent falls by improving balance and control. This exercise uses slow, flowing movements to help people relax and coordinate the mind and body. It can also boost your self-confidence. Dancing and other rhythmic movements can help as well.



Mild weight-bearing exercise -- such as walking or climbing stairs -- may help slow bone loss from osteoporosis. Having strong bones can prevent fractures if you do fall.

Your doctor or a physical therapist can check your walking and balance. They might do a "Get-Up and Go" test. This simple test shows how steady you are when you get up from a chair. The test also is used to check your walking ability.

Have Your Medicines Reviewed

Find out about the possible side effects of medicines you take. Some medications



might affect your coordination or balance, or cause dizziness, confusion, or sleepiness. Some medications don't work well together, adding to your

risk of falls.

Bring your prescribed and over-the-counter medicines with you when you visit the doctor. Also bring any vitamins, minerals, and herbal products you are taking.

Ask if any of your medicines or over-the-counter products could increase your risk of falling. Never stop taking your medications unless you talk with your doctor first. Also, limit the amount of alcohol you drink. Even a small amount can affect your balance and reflexes.

Have Your Blood Pressure Checked When Lying and Standing

Some older people have normal or increased blood pressure while seated, but their blood pressure drops too much on standing. There is no way to know unless you check. Tell your doctor if you feel faint or unsteady when you get up from sitting or lying down.

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Get a Vision Check-Up

Have your vision tested regularly or if you think it has changed. Even small changes in sight can make you less stable.

Wear your eyeglasses so you can see your surroundings clearly. Keep them clean and check to see that the frames are straight. When you get new glasses, be extra cautious while you are getting used to them. If you use reading glasses or multi-focal lenses, take them off when you're walking. They can distort your sense of distance and lead to a fall.

Choose Safe Footwear

Our feet have nerves that help us judge the position of our bodies. To work correctly, our feet need to be in touch with the ground and our shoes need to stay securely with the foot as we take each step. Otherwise, falls may occur.

It's important to select your footwear carefully to help prevent falls. Wear sensible, low-heeled shoes that fit well and support your feet. There should be no marks on your feet when you take off your shoes and socks.

Your shoes should completely surround your feet. Wearing only socks or wearing floppy, backless slippers or shoes without backs can be unsafe. Also, choose shoes with non-slip soles. Smooth soles can cause you to slip on waxed or polished floors



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Falls and Older Adults

If You Fall

Whether you're at home or somewhere else, a sudden fall can be startling and upsetting. If you do fall, stay as calm as possible. Take several deep breaths to try to relax.

Remain still on the floor or ground for a few moments. This will help you get over the shock of falling. It will also give you time to decide if you're hurt before getting up. Getting up too quickly or in the wrong way could make an injury worse.

If you think you can get up safely without help, roll over onto your side. Rest again while your body and blood pressure adjust. Slowly get up on your hands and knees, and crawl to a sturdy chair.

Put your hands on the chair seat and slide one foot forward so that it is flat on the floor. Keep the other leg bent so the knee is on the floor. From this kneeling position, slowly rise and turn your body to sit in the chair.

If you're hurt or can't get up on your own, ask someone for help or call 911. If you're alone, try to get into a comfortable position and wait for help to arrive.



If you have problems with balance or dizziness, be sure to discuss these with your doctor. If you are often alone, and at increased risk of falling, consider getting a personal emergency response system. This service, which works through your telephone line, provides a button or bracelet to wear at all times in your home.

If you fall or need emergency assistance for any reason, a push of the button will alert the service. Emergency medical services will be called. There is a fee for medical monitoring services, but it may be worth the cost.

Carrying a portable phone with you as you move about your house could make it easier to call someone if you need assistance. You might also put a telephone in a place that you can reach from the floor in case you fall and need help.

Be sure to discuss any fall with your doctor. Write down when, where, and how you fell so you can discuss the details with your doctor. The doctor can assess whether a medical issue or other cause of the fall needs to be addressed. Knowing the cause can help you plan to prevent future falls.

Many older people who have fallen are afraid of falling again. Even if a fall doesn't cause injury, the fear of falling again might prevent you from doing activities you enjoy or need to do. Fear of falling also might cause you to stay at home away from your friends, family, and others.

Your muscles and bones can weaken over time without the physical activity that comes with doing daily tasks or exercise. As a result, you could become more -- not less -- likely to fall.

After a fall, your doctor might refer you to other health care providers who can help prevent future falls. A physical therapist can help with gait, balance, strength training, and walking aids. An occupational therapist can suggest changes in your home that may lower your risk of falls.

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