

Guide to Fall Prevention:

Where to start to prevent potential falls

One in four Americans age 65 and older fall each year. Falls can be a threat to the health and safety of seniors, and be a strain on their economic security and independent lifestyle. Falling, however, is preventable, and recovery is possible. This is your guide to staying strong and safeguarding yourself and your loved ones from falls.

Talk to Your Health Care Provider

First and foremost, listen to your health care provider. Share your history of recent falls, and take their advice on next steps. Talk openly with your doctor.



Find a Good Balance and Exercise Program

Look to build balance, strength, and flexibility. Find a program that works for you, and take a friend. Program options can be found in this booklet.



Regularly Review Your Medications with Your Doctor or Pharmacist

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you feel dizzy, sleepy, or confused. The highest risk for falls is when a medication is started, or a dose is increased.



Get Your Vision and Hearing Checked Annually and Update Your Eyeglasses

Your eyes and ears are key to keeping you on your feet. Keep your glasses clean, and take off bifocals or progressive glasses on steps.



Keep Your Home Safe

Remove tripping hazards, increase lighting, make stairs safe, place items you use often within easy reach, and install grab bars in key areas.



Talk to Your Family Members

Enlist their support in taking simple steps to stay safe. Falls are not just your issue, everyone can help keep you safe and healthy.



Fall Prevention Guidelines

Smart strategies can help you prevent falls and avoid injury

Keeping your balance

Tips for standing up, moving heavy objects, and sitting.

Think before you move

Plan the path and make sure it's clear

How to stand up:

- Move to the edge of a chair
- Put both feet firmly on the floor
- Lean forward so that your nose is over your toes
- Push up from the chair using the arm rests or the edge of the seat

Remember: Using unsteady objects for support, such as a walker or cane, could cause you to fall.

When moving a person or heavy object:

- Use your leg and stomach muscles - NOT your back
- Bend at the knees - NOT at the waist
- Avoid twisting or stretching - move or change directions with your feet
- Hold objects as close to you as possible



Remember your posture - think 90 degrees

Poor posture can not only lead to pain, but also a loss of balance

- Your back should be at a right angle to your thighs
- Your thighs should be at a right angle to your back and lower legs
- Sit on a chair with a firm back and seat
- Sitting in a chair or couch that you sink into may make it harder to stand up



How to get up after a fall

Do not try to get up from the floor after you fall if you are dizzy, in pain, or unsteady. Instead, call for help or use your Personal Emergency Response System. If you feel okay, try the following steps:

1. Move to a sitting position. Stay there for few minutes to get over the shock of falling. Take deep breaths.
2. Find the nearest sturdy chair or solid piece of furniture.
3. Roll onto your hands and knees and crawl to the chair.
4. Put your strongest leg under you, so your foot is on the floor. Hold on to the chair and push yourself up.
5. Sit in the chair until you feel steady enough to walk.
6. If you have not already done so, contact a loved one or call for help.

Choose a Fall Prevention Program that is right for you

The National Council on Aging recommends A Matter of Balance and Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention, two-evidence-based programs proven to reduce your risk of falling. These programs are offered at Phelps Hospital, free of charge.

A Matter of Balance: Managing Concerns About Falls

Many seniors experience a fear of falling, and restrict their activities because of this. A Matter of Balance emphasizes practical strategies to reduce this fear, and increase activity levels by improving strength, balance, and flexibility. Participants learn to view falls and fear of falling as controllable, set realistic goals to increase activity, and change their environment to reduce fall risk factors. This program is appropriate for anyone concerned about falls, anyone who restricts their activities due to a fear of falling, and anyone who has fallen. A Matter of Balance is a scientifically proven balance program that includes eight two-hour sessions led by trained facilitators. This program was developed at Boston University, and has been nationally recognized for its success.

Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention

This program is one of the most effective ways to improve your balance and prevent falls. Tai Chi will improve your balance, strength, stamina, stability, flexibility, and cognitive focus. It is recommended that beginners take a one-hour class twice a week for a minimum of 8-12 weeks.

For more information on programs here at Phelps Hospital, please reach out to Ellen at (914) 366-3937, or email Vitality@northwell.edu

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Home Safety

There are many ways you can reduce your risk of falling around your home

Proper Lighting

- Always turn on lights before entering a room/hallway
- Replace a burned out bulb immediately
- Keep nightlights on along your route to the bathroom
- Make sure all walkways are well lit, especially at night

Bathroom Safety

- Use non-slip mats in your tub and shower
- Install grab bars in your tub/shower near the toilet
- Use a shower seat
- Use a hand-held shower head to make bathing easier

Wet, Slippery, or Uneven Surfaces

- Watch where you walk – be alert for ice, snow, wet surfaces, dry and wet leaves, moss covered paths, or steps and uneven walkways
- Watch for wet/uneven surfaces when exiting your car
- Be careful on tile or marble floors
- Clean up spills immediately

Secure Walkways

- Make sure carpeting is securely fastened. Do not use throw rugs.
- Place non-skid backing on area rugs and replace as needed
- Place bright, contrasting color tape on the top and bottom steps on stairways
- Keep walkways clear of clutter and wires from lamps or telephones
- Take well-used pathways rather than shortcuts when walking
- Be alert to pets and children who can move quickly and unexpectedly

Railings

- Check for secure railings, preferably on both sides
- Install hand railings on outside stairs

Footwear

- Wear shoes and slippers that have backs and rubber-soles
- Avoid wearing smooth-bottom footwear, high heels, and socks without shoes or slippers

General Safety

- Be alert to possible hazards when you are visiting friends and family, or are in unfamiliar surroundings
- Be alert as you enter and exit areas that may have curbs
- Be alert when entering or exiting elevators and escalators
- Let the phone ring- don't run to answer it
- Use a sturdy stool or step ladder to change light bulbs, or reach high objects

Personal Safety

- Have vision and hearing tested regularly, and properly corrected
- Get up slowly after eating, resting, and sleeping
- Talk to your pharmacist and doctors about how any medications you are taking may affect your balance and coordination
- Limit your alcohol consumption
- Use a cane, walking stick, or walker to help you maintain your balance. Consult your doctor or physical therapist to make sure you are using the correct walking aid, & that you are using it correctly
- Be sure to get regular exercise