



EXERCISE

Keeping in good physical condition with moderate daily exercise will reduce your risk of falls. A combination of flexibility, weight bearing exercises and aerobic exercise can markedly improve your level of fitness-at any age. Even if you should fall, being in good physical condition will lower your chances of serious injury and raise your ability to heal quickly and completely. You should always talk to your healthcare provider about what kinds of exercise are best for you and about specific exercise instructions.

Regular Exercise Can:

- Improve your muscle tone, strength and endurance
- Keep joints, tendons and ligaments more flexible for unrestricted movement
- Increase your sense of balance, agility and confidence
- Strengthen your bones to fight osteoporosis and resist injury

Different Types of Exercises:

- Physical therapists can teach people how to compensate for balance problems and determine if your walking could be steadied with either an exercise program to strengthen muscles, or an assistive device such as a cane or walker.
- Community programs such as: Tai Chi, Enhanced Fitness, Matter of Balance, group exercise programs, individual exercise sessions can provide strength, balance and flexibility.

Certain disorders like arthritis or strokes may inhibit movement and prevent a senior from responding rapidly to avert a fall. Quick motions can also affect the inner ear and cause dizziness, so it's important to allow time to adjust for balance when getting up from a sitting or lying position.



VISION

Eye disease or normal aging can make it difficult for seniors to read fine print, judge distance or identify objects clearly. These factors can lead them to develop a poor sense of balance or misread medicinal instructions. Have your vision checked annually and prescriptions updated as needed.

The three most common eye conditions in older adults are cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration. All of these conditions can develop slowly and gradually without symptoms until vision is impaired.

- A cataract is the thickening of the eye lens due to aging which causes gradual sight loss.
- Glaucoma is an increase in pressure inside the eye that causes gradual sight loss.
- Macular degeneration is the gradual loss of central vision.

Reduced depth perception due to bifocals, reading glasses, low lighting, and some eye conditions can cause falls. Reduced depth perception makes it difficult to accurately judge walkway changes like curbs, steps, and uneven ground, and can affect driving skills. In addition, a loss of depth perception makes it difficult to see objects in areas of shadow, low lighting, nighttime darkness, or excessive brightness.



SAFE USE OF MEDICATION

Four out of five older adults take at least one prescription medication per day and most take at least 2 prescriptions a day. Drug interactions and the physical changes that come with age can lead to an increased risk of falling. While all drugs should be administered carefully, certain medicines are more likely to involve risk of falling than others, such as those affecting the central nervous and cardiovascular systems. The more medications taken, the greater risk of drug interactions and side effects. Symptoms can range from dizziness to drowsiness, vision impairment and loss of balance.

Tips to manage your medication safely:

Keep a complete and updated medication list, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, herbs, and vitamins, and always carry it with you. Bring your medication list every time you visit the doctor or hospital.

Have all your medications filled at one pharmacy. All pharmacies have a computer system that can detect potential drug interactions. Ask your pharmacist or your doctor about drug interactions ("Will this medication interfere with my other medications?").

Take your medications regularly, don't skip or decrease the dose to cut cost.

Avoid over-the-counter sleeping aids, allergy medications and antihistamines in over-the-counter cough and cold products. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist for a better and safer alternative.

If you see a specialist, make sure your specialist sends reports to your primary care doctor. Also tell your primary care doctor if other doctors have changed your medications.

Always ask your doctor before you start an herbal supplement or over-the-counter remedy and don't forget to ask your pharmacist to check for herb-drug interactions.

Report adverse drug reactions to your doctor.

Ask your pharmacist if your medications look different in any way (color, size, shape) than the ones you're currently taking.

Limit use of alcohol.

Never use someone else's medications and discard old unused medications.

Information provided by Central Pierce Fire & Rescue and courtesy of King County Fire & Life Coalition.



HOME MODIFICATION/CHECKLIST

Approximately 50%-70% of falls are due to home hazards, so it's crucial to recognize risks before they lead to an accident. The following checklist will help you identify common hazards that lead to falls.

Lighting

- Keep stairways, halls & walkways well lit.
- Light bulbs should be 60-75 watts in all rooms.

Floors

- Arrange furniture so that you have plenty of room to walk without obstacles.
- Keep walkways free of cords, clutter, and other obstacles.
- Don't let newspapers/magazines collect on the floor.
- Remove throw rugs or secure them with double stick tape or tacks.
- Take care of spills and dropped objects promptly.

Steps and Stairways

- All stairs and steps should have secure handrails on both sides.
- Secure loose carpet or loose steps.
- Stairs should be well lit with light switches at the top and bottom.
- Keep stairways free of clutter.

Living Room/Bedroom/Kitchen

- Make sure that your furniture is easy for you to get in and out of (knee height or higher is easiest).
- Arrange the rooms to create clear walking spaces.
- Keep regularly used items within comfortable reach.
- Keep a phone on a low table within reach of the floor.
- Keep a light/flashlight and phone within reach of your bed.
- Install nightlights in your bedroom and bathroom.

Bathrooms

- Place a non-skid rug on the bathroom floor.
- Install and use wall grab bars by the toilet and inside the shower/tub area.
- Line the tub or shower with non-skid mats or non-slip adhesive strips.
- Use a shower chair and handheld shower head.

Shoes

- Firmly fastened (vel-cro or cotton laces)
- Non-skid
- Low-heeled
- Lightweight and supportive

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