

Talk to Your Doctor If...

- You have experienced a fall
- You have ever felt unsteady on your feet
- You have felt dizzy or lightheaded
- You think you may need a walker or cane
- You are on more than three medications to review side effects and interactions



This brochure is part of a series originated by the Massachusetts Medical Society Committee on Geriatric Medicine.

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Simple Measures for Successful Aging

PREVENTING FALLS

Brought to you by

The Massachusetts Medical Society
Committee on Geriatric Medicine



MASSACHUSETTS
MEDICAL SOCIETY

*Every physician matters,
each patient counts.*

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For additional copies of this brochure,
call (800) 843-6356.

For more information about preventing falls, call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health/ Massachusetts Falls Prevention Coalition toll-free hotline at (800) 227-SAFE (7233).



Preventing Falls

Every year about one-third of Americans over the age of 65 fall. Sometimes a fall is the result of a serious medical problem, so it is important to tell your doctor and obtain an evaluation if you have fallen.

By preventing falls, you can avoid injuries such as bruises, broken bones, and head trauma. There are several ways to help keep yourself safe and avoid falling.

Stay Physically Fit

Regular physical activity keeps muscles strong. Some good choices are:

- Balance training, such as tai chi or pilates
- Walking (e.g., with your dog or in the mall)
- Wheeling yourself in your wheelchair
- House cleaning
- Gardening

Remember to wear sturdy shoes, drink enough water, avoid exerting yourself in extremely hot weather, and exercise with a partner, if possible.



Wear Smart Footwear

- Wear walking shoes, even when at home.
- Avoid walking barefoot or wearing high heels more than an inch tall.
- Wear slippers with a firm rubber sole.
- Take good care of your feet and tell your doctor if they cause you pain.



Keep Your Home Safe

- Most falls occur in the home.
- Keep the floor clear of objects that are easy to stumble on, such as electrical cords and low furniture. Rugs should be tacked down or have a nonslip backing.
- Keep your home well lit (e.g., by using night lights in the bathroom, bedroom, and hallway).
- Place sturdy items around your home to hold on to when you walk from room to room in case you lose your balance. Install handrails in hallways and on stairs.
- Keep things within easy reach (e.g., on lower shelves in closets and cabinets) to avoid having to use a step stool.
- Install handrails in the bathroom if you need assistance getting up from the toilet or out of the shower. Use no-slip strips in the bathtub.

Maintain Good Eyesight

See your eye doctor once a year.

Promote Healthy Bones

- Having healthy bones will help to prevent a fracture in the event of a fall and will also keep you steadier on your feet.
- Ask your doctor if you are at risk for osteoporosis.
- You can help prevent osteoporosis by drinking milk, eating cheese or yogurt, or taking supplements. These products will increase your calcium intake.
- Many people — especially those in the Northeast — don't spend much time in the sun and therefore have low vitamin D levels. This increases the risk of falls and fracture. Take a multivitamin that includes vitamin D, and ask your doctor if you should have your vitamin D level checked.

