

# Falls Fast Facts

Falls are an everyday occurrence worldwide across all age groups. Though many falls only result in minor injuries, a large number result in devastating outcomes causing disability or death. Thankfully, falls are preventable if precautions are taken. **ThinkFirst** about your lifestyle and take steps to prevent falling. Talk with your doctor, take a class and learn all you can to prevent falls.

## KNOW THE FACTS

- 1 out of every 5 falls result in a serious injury, such as a head injury or broken bone.
- 2.5 million people are treated for fall injuries each year in emergency departments.
- Falls are the leading cause of fatal and non-fatal injuries in older Americans (65+).
- Falls are the second leading cause of unintentional injury deaths worldwide.
- Falls are the most common cause of TBI.

## FALL PREVENTION TIPS

- **Talk with your doctor** to evaluate your fall risk and have your medications and eyes checked regularly
- **Understand your medications** that make you dizzy, sleepy or could affect clotting time if a fall caused bleeding
- **Improve home safety** by removing clutter and loose rugs, installing handrails and ample lighting, using nonslip bath mats and grab bars in the shower, wearing nonslip shoes
- **Perform exercise** for strength and balance, and eat a healthy diet with adequate fluids

## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

### Q: How many people fall each year?

Millions of people, especially over the age of 65, fall each year. The exact number is not known because less than half of people who fall tell their physician. However, it is estimated that 1 out of every 3 people over the age of 65 will fall each year.

### Q: What are the most common fall-related injuries?

Some of the most common injuries due to falls include traumatic brain injury (TBI), such as concussions, and fractures of the hip, pelvis, vertebrae, legs and arms.

### Q: Where do falls most often occur?

More than half of all falls occur at home, although falls can occur anywhere at any given time. Conduct a home safety check!

## WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR FALLS?

- Old age (65+)
- Arthritis
- Diabetes
- Chronic pain
- Parkinson's Disorder
- Muscle weakness
- Anemia or other blood disorders
- Dizziness or difficulty balancing
- Foot disorders
- Substance abuse
- Dementia, Alzheimer's, depression and other brain/mood disorders
- Dehydration
- Low vitamin D
- Fear of falling
- Medication side effects

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# Home Safety Checklist

Falls in the home are one of the top causes of injuries among older adults. Many injuries are caused by everyday hazards in the home that are often overlooked. By spotting these hazards and taking steps to fix them, you can prevent injuries. Use this checklist to **ThinkFirst** and reduce hazards around your home.

## GENERAL SAFETY

- Telephones are positioned low enough to be reached from the floor
- Rooms are well-lit with appropriate bulbs
- A fire extinguisher is present
- Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms are present/working
- Medicines are clearly marked and stored in child-proof containers

## FLOORS

- Furniture is arranged to allow for clear walking paths
- Wires/cords are organized with tacks/tape
- Floors are rid of clutter and obstacles
- Throw rugs (if present) have a non-slip backing

## BEDROOMS

- Lamps are within arm's reach of the bed
- A flashlight is within arm's reach of the bed
- Night-lights are used to illuminate walkways
- A telephone is within arm's reach of the bed

## STAIRS AND STEPS

- Steps are stable and in good condition
- Carpet (if present) is firmly attached to every step
- Rubber treads are present on stairs without carpet
- Handrails are secure
- Handrails are present on both sides of the stairs
- Overhead lights are present at the top and bottom of the stairs
- Stairs are rid of clutter and obstacles

## KITCHEN

- Frequently-used items are stored in lower cabinets
- Stepstools (if absolutely necessary) have a bar to hold on to

## BATHROOMS

- A rubber mat is present on the floor on the tub
- Slip-resistant materials are used on the bathroom floor
- Grab bars are present inside the tub
- Grab bars are present next to the toilet
- Electrical appliances are stored away from water sources

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# Talking with Your Doctor

**ThinkFirst** before you head to the doctor – organize your thoughts and plan out what you would like to discuss. Use this form to write out your concerns from most important to least important.

| Concerns |  |
|----------|--|
| 1        |  |
| 2        |  |
| 3        |  |
| 4        |  |
| 5        |  |
| 6        |  |
| 7        |  |
| 8        |  |
| NOTES    |  |

## WHY DISCUSS FALLS?

- Gives your doctor a full understanding of your situation and needs
- Assists you in keeping your independence
- Helps your doctor treat issues before it is too late

## TOPICS TO CONSIDER WHEN TALKING WITH YOUR DOCTOR:

- Number of times you fell in the last year
- Details surrounding the last time you fell
- Injuries you sustained from falling
- Causes of your falls
- Lifestyle changes you've felt because of your falls
- Medication side effects that could increase the risk of falls
- Medication alternatives with minimal fall risk

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# Medication Management

Some medicines have side effects that can put you at risk of falling, such as dizziness, anxiety, or changes to your blood pressure. Do NOT stop taking any medicine without speaking to your doctor, but it is important to **ThinkFirst** about what you take and why.

## STAY ORGANIZED

- Pick one day of the week to **sort** your medicine in a pill organizer
- Use **timers** to help you remember to take your medicine
- Maintain a **list or chart** of all the medicine you take
  - » Include: name of medicine, purpose, dose, when to take, special instructions, pill color and shape, date started, prescribing doctor
  - » Keep copies on your refrigerator and in your wallet or purse
- Place **notes** around the house as reminders to take your medicine

## STAY INFORMED

**Ask:** Why am I taking this medicine?

**Ask:** Do I need to take this medicine?

**Ask:** Does this medicine put me at risk of falling?

## STAY ENGAGED

- Review all of your prescriptions with your doctor at each visit
- Tell your doctor about any over-the-counter medicine you take
- Talk to your doctor if you are experiencing any medicine side effects
- Ask your doctor what you can do to minimize side effects

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# Nutrition

Nutrition is a key step in preventing falls. Eating healthy provides your bones, muscles, and other tissues with the nutrients they need to be strong. **ThinkFirst** about your food choices – they can make a huge impact on your health and how you feel.

## NUTRITION LABELS

### Ingredients List

Ingredients are listed on the label from largest to smallest amount (i.e. there's more of the first ingredient than any other ingredient)

### Nutrition Facts

At the top of the label, you'll find how much is considered one serving of that food or drink and the number of servings in the container. All of the nutrition information is for one serving.

### Daily Value (DV)

This is how much of each nutrient most people need each day. The % DV says what part (as a percent) of the total daily recommendation for a nutrient is in a serving based on eating a 2,000 calories each day.

## FOOD GROUPS

Grains: 6 oz  
Vegetables: 2 ½ cups  
Fruits: 2 cups  
Protein: 5 ½ oz  
Dairy products: 3 cups  
Oils: 27 grams  
Solid fats & sugars: 258 calories  
Seafood : 8 oz/week  
Nuts, seeds, soy: 4 oz/week  
Meat, poultry, or eggs: 26 oz/week

*\*based on a 2000 calorie diet*

## EXPIRATION DATES

**Sell by** tells you how long the store can sell the food. Buy them before this date.

**Use by** tells you how long the food is at peak quality. Some food might not be safe if used after this date.

**Best if used by** tells you how long the food has the best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

## TIPS FOR A HEALTHY DIET

- Add flavor to foods with spices and herbs instead of salt. Packaged foods should be low-sodium.
- Add fruits and vegetables to meals and snacks. Look for pre-cut fruits and vegetables on sale if slicing is a challenge.
- Ask your doctor to suggest other options if the medications you take affect your appetite.
- Drink milk (fat-free or low-fat) throughout the day. If you do not like milk, try small amounts of yogurt, butter, milk, or hard cheese.
- Drink water instead of sugary drinks.
- Consume foods fortified with vitamin B12, such as fortified cereals.

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# What To Do Following a Fall

Sometimes older adults are able to get up from a fall without any injuries and continue about their day. In other cases older adults may not be able to get up, and/or may need medical attention. **ThinkFirst** after a fall occurs, and always notify your doctor when you fall.

## STEPS TO TAKE FOLLOWING A FALL

**1. Assess** the situation, take deep breaths, and determine if you are hurt.

**2. Get help** using a phone or your voice. Attract attention by shouting or banging on something.

**3. Get up** if you feel strong enough to get up. Use a stable chair to help.

**4. Call your doctor** regardless of if you've been injured.

## REASONS YOU MAY NEED IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION:

- You hit your head (no matter how minor)
- You passed out
- You have pain anywhere on your body
- You take a blood thinner
- You have any bleeding
- You have trouble breathing
- You have numbness/tingling
- You can't move any part of your body
- You are confused
- You are dizzy
- You are having belly pain
- Your fall was caused by anything other than tripping or poor footing
- You have neck pain or stiffness
- You are unable to get up (or had to lay there for >15 minutes)
- You fell from any height higher than standing

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# Concussion

A concussion is an injury to the brain caused by a blow, bump, jolt, or sudden movement. A concussion **is** a traumatic brain injury.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF A CONCUSSION?

### Changes to your mood

- irritability
- sadness
- anxiety
- nervousness

### Physical symptoms

- headache
- blurry vision
- fatigue
- nausea or vomiting
- dizziness
- sensitivity to light or sound
- balance problems

### Changes to your thinking

- feeling slowed down
- difficulty concentrating
- difficulty remembering new information
- difficulty thinking clearly

### Changes to your sleep

- sleeping more/less than usual
- trouble falling asleep
- feeling tired or having no energy

## REMEMBER

Always contact your doctor if you think that you have a concussion.

There are many people who can help you and your family as you recover from a concussion.

Keep talking with your doctor, family members, and loved ones about how you are feeling, both physically and emotionally.

## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO

- Ignoring your symptoms and trying to “tough it out” can make symptoms worse
- Tell someone about how you are feeling
- Call your doctor

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# Exercise

Exercise enhances your physical and mental flexibility by improving flexibility, coordination, balance, overall conditioning, blood pressure, and sensory input. Complete exercises according to your own body and fitness level. Always **ThinkFirst** by consulting your doctor to determine what is best and safest for your body.



## STANDING TANDEM BALANCE WITH COUNTER SUPPORT

**Setup:** Begin in a standing upright position with your hands resting on a counter.

**Movement:** Place one foot directly behind the other so you are in a heel-toe position. Maintain your balance in this position.

**Tips:** Make sure to maintain an upright posture. Use the countertop as needed for balance.

*Hold position for 30 seconds. Complete 3 sets per leg.*



## STANDING SINGLE LEG STANCE WITH COUNTER SUPPORT

**Setup:** Begin in a standing upright position with your hands resting on a counter.

**Movement:** Lift one foot off of the ground. Maintain your balance in this position.

**Tips:** Make sure to maintain an upright posture. Use the countertop as needed for balance.

*Hold position for 30 seconds. Complete 3 sets per leg.*



## STANDING HIP EXTENSION WITH COUNTER SUPPORT

**Setup:** Begin in a standing upright position with your hands resting on a counter.

**Movement:** Tighten your buttock muscles and slowly lift your leg backward. Return to the starting position and repeat.

**Tips:** Make sure to keep your moving leg straight and keep your shoulders and hips facing forward during the exercise. Use the countertop as needed for balance.

*Complete 10 repetitions per leg. Complete 2-3 sets.*



## STANDING MARCH WITH COUNTER SUPPORT

**Setup:** Begin in a standing upright position with your hands resting on a counter.

**Movement:** Slowly lift one knee to waist height, then lower it back down and repeat, alternating legs.

**Tips:** Make sure to maintain an upright posture. Use the countertop as needed for balance.

*Complete 10 repetitions per leg. Complete 2-3 sets.*





### HEEL RAISES WITH COUNTER SUPPORT

**Setup:** Begin in a standing upright position with your hands resting on a counter.

**Movement:** Slowly raise your heels off the ground, hold briefly, then lower them back down and repeat.

**Tips:** Make sure to maintain an upright posture. Use the countertop as needed for balance. Do not let your ankles rotate inward or outward.

**Complete 10 repetitions. Complete 2-3 sets.**



### SIT TO STAND WITH HANDS ON KNEES

**Setup:** Begin by sitting upright on a chair with your feet slightly wider than shoulder width apart and your hands resting on your knees.

**Movement:** Lean forward at your hips until your bottom starts to lift off the chair. Move your body into a standing upright position, then reverse the order of your movements to return to sitting.

**Tips:** If unable to perform without support of arms, use arms as needed. Make sure not to let your knees collapse inward during the exercise.

**Complete 5 repetitions. Complete 1-2 sets.**



### SEATED ANKLE ALPHABET

**Setup:** Begin by sitting upright on a stable surface with your legs unsupported.

**Movement:** Slowly trace the letters of the alphabet with the big toe of your foot.

**Tips:** Make sure to keep your upper leg still as you move your foot. You should be moving at your ankle only.

**Perform the alphabet. Complete 1-2 sets.**

Keep all motions are slow and controlled. | Exercises should not cause discomfort or pain. | Don't force range of motion on any exercise to avoid possible strains and pulled muscles. | Make sure that you are breathing through each exercise. | Take your time transitioning to make sure that you don't get dizzy. **This general information is not intended to treat any medical condition nor to replace the guidance of a healthcare professional.**

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