



**HOME SAFETY  
IS BONE SAFETY.**

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## **FALLS AWARENESS & PREVENTION GUIDE**

**Prepare your home or assist a loved one today by following these fall-proofing recommendations, courtesy of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons and The Orthopaedic Trauma Association.**



# FALLS AWARENESS & PREVENTION GUIDE



Taking a fall at home can be a frightening and life-changing experience, especially for the elderly and those living alone. But, with a few simple changes at home, you and your loved ones can protect your bones and stay safe and independent at home.

Don't overlook the risks lurking in your home or the changes needed to safeguard your health. Take steps today to prevent accidents and injuries. Remember: **Home Safety is Bone Safety!**

In this guide, the members of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) and The Orthopaedic Trauma Association share tips on how you or a loved one can:

- Recognize the medical, personal and environmental factors that increase your risk of a fall.
- Make modifications to your bathroom, stairways, kitchen, bedroom and living areas to help fall-proof your home.
- Reduce your risk of injury and contact a friend, relative or emergency service in the event of a fall.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, falls are the leading cause of both fatal and nonfatal injuries among elderly adults. In 2010, more than 2.3 million Americans were treated in emergency departments for fall-related injuries, leading to nearly \$30 billion in direct medical costs.

The statistics can be grim, but the solutions are simple. Learn more at [orthoinfo.org/falls](http://orthoinfo.org/falls).

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# ARE YOU AT A HIGH RISK OF A FALL?

There are a number of medical, personal and environmental factors that can make someone more susceptible to a fall-related injury. Familiarize yourself with the following risk factors to find out if you or a loved one is at a high risk of falling.



## MEDICAL RISK FACTORS

- Impaired musculoskeletal function
- Osteoporosis
- Cardiac arrhythmias (irregular heartbeat)
- Blood pressure fluctuation
- Alzheimer's disease and senility
- Arthritis
- Hip weakness and imbalance
- Neurological conditions such as stroke, Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis
- Urinary and bladder dysfunction
- Vision or hearing loss
- Cancer that affects the bones
- Side effects of medications

## PERSONAL RISK FACTORS

- Inadequate footwear
- Not drinking enough water
- Excessive use of alcohol



## ENVIRONMENTAL RISK FACTORS

- Slippery or wet surfaces
- Poor lighting
- Cluttered pathways in the home
- Pets that create tripping hazards
- All throw rugs and area rugs that are not properly secured



## What lifestyle choices can you make to help reduce your risk of falling?

There are a number of things you can do to keep your bones strong and lessen your risk of a fall-related injury, including:

- Maintain a healthy lifestyle and stay physically active.
- Have your bone density tested annually to help recognize signs of developing osteoporosis, as recommended by your physician.
- Get an annual eye examination.
- Get an annual physical that includes an evaluation for cardiac and blood pressure problems.
- Maintain a healthy diet with adequate dietary calcium and Vitamin D from both food and supplements.
- Check with your doctor(s) about any side effects of your medications; make sure all medications are clearly labeled and stored in a well-lit area and take medications on schedule with a full glass of water, unless otherwise instructed.

## BONE LOSS RISK FACTORS

- Lack of exercise and activity
- Smoking
- Unhealthy diet



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More info at [orthoinfo.org/falls](https://www.orthoinfo.org/falls)

# TIPS ON FALL-PROOFING YOUR HOME

Research shows that simple safety modifications at home, where most falls occur, can substantially cut the risk of falls and related injuries — such as bone fractures — for seniors.

Prepare your home or assist a loved one today by following these fall-proofing recommendations, courtesy of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons and The Orthopaedic Trauma Association.



## BATHROOM

- Place a slip-resistant rug or rubber mat adjacent to the bathtub for safe exit and entry.
- Use a rubber mat or place non-skid adhesive textured strips inside the tub.
- Use a sturdy, plastic seat in the bathtub if you cannot lower yourself to the floor of the tub or you are unsteady.
- Install grab bars on the shower walls.
- Replace glass shower enclosures with non-shattering material.
- Stabilize yourself on the toilet by using a raised seat or a toilet seat with armrests.
- Keep a nightlight on in the bathroom.



## KITCHEN

- Immediately clean up any liquids, grease or food spilled on the floor.
- Store food, dishes and cooking equipment within easy reach.
  - Do not stand on chairs or boxes to reach upper cabinets.
- Remove all throw rugs and hold area rugs in place with a rubber, slip-resistant backing.
- Use non-skid floor wax.



## STAIRWAYS

- Keep stairs clear of packages, boxes or clutter.
- Provide enough light to clearly see each stair and the top and bottom landings.
  - Light switches should be at both the top and bottom of stairs.
  - Consider installing motion-detector lights that turn on automatically when you approach.
  - Keep flashlights nearby in case of a power outage.
- Remove all throw rugs, and secure area rugs near the bottom and top of stairs with a rubber, slip-resistant backing.
- Install a contrast strip on the edge of each stair to increase their visibility.
- Put non-slip treads on each bare-wood step.
- Install handrails on both sides of the stairway.
  - Each should be 30 inches above the stairs and extend the full length of the stairs.
- Repair loose stairway carpeting, wooden boards and loose handrails immediately.

# TIPS ON FALL-PROOFING YOUR HOME *continued*



## BEDROOM

- Place a lamp, telephone and flashlight near your bed.
- Keep clutter off the bedroom floor.
- Arrange clothes in your closet so that they are easy to reach.
  - Do not stand on chairs or boxes to reach upper shelves.
- Install a nightlight along the route between your bedroom and the bathroom.
- Sleep on a bed that is easy to get into and out of.
- Replace satiny sheets and comforters with non-slip fabrics such as flannel.



## OUTSIDE

- Keep the path between your driveway and the front door, as well as the pathway between the mailbox and your front door well-lit and clear of debris.
- For cold weather locations, keep salt and a shovel near the front door so you do not have to walk on an icy sidewalk in order to reach them.
- Install motion-detector lights so they turn on automatically when you step outside at night.
- At least one covered, no-step entry with a ramp is recommended for any home.



## FOOTWEAR

- Wear properly fitting shoes with rubber, non-skid soles.
- Avoid wearing high heels.
- Tie your shoe laces and never walk in bare socks.
- Replace slippers that have stretched out of shape or are too loose.



## LIVING AREAS

- Keep low-rise coffee tables, magazine racks, footrests and plants out of the path of foot traffic.
  - Arrange furniture so that you have a clear pathway between rooms.
- Walk only in well-lit rooms and always turn on lights.
  - Install easy-access light switches at room entrances so you do not have to walk into a dark room to turn on the light.
  - Motion or sound activated lights and glow-in-the-dark switches are also helpful.
- Remove boxes, newspapers and all clutter from pathways, including doorways and hallways.
  - Keep electric, appliance and telephone cords out of walkways, but do not hide cords under a rug because it creates a tripping hazard.
- Secure loose area rugs with a rubber, slip-resistant backing.
- Replace chairs or sofas that are so low they are difficult to get out of.
- Repair loose wooden floorboards immediately.
- Remove door sills higher than a half inch.



## PETS

- Place a bell on your small pets so you can locate them easily and know when they are near your feet, creating a potential tripping hazard.
- Train dogs to walk beside you, instead of in front of you.
- In the case of a larger or stronger dog, train your pet not to pull you when on a leash.

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW IF YOU FALL

Taking a fall at home can be very frightening, especially if you are home alone or have been injured as a result. Follow these guidelines and share them with family members to help you or your loved ones recover quickly from a fall:

## BEFORE YOU FALL ...



- Make the changes suggested in the home safety checklist.
- Make it a habit to have a relative, friend or neighbor check in with you once a day so there is someone designated to investigate in case you are unable to answer the phone or come to the door.

**Ensure your safety:** Medical alert devices are a helpful way to help ensure your safety after an unfortunate fall or accident.

- In order for a medical alert device to be effective, it must be worn at all times, even when showering or sleeping.
- Cellphones are not an effective alternative to medical alert devices. They are not waterproof and do not remain attached to your body when undressed. Also, someone with mild cognitive impairment may not be able to use a phone properly, especially in a time of panic and distress.

## WHEN FALLING ...



- Do not extend your arms to break the fall. Instead, raise an arm to protect your head.
- Try to fall on your side or buttocks and roll over naturally.

## AFTER YOU FALL ...



- Do not panic! If you try to get up too early or from the wrong position you could make an injury worse.
- Take several deep breaths, assess the situation and determine if you are hurt.
- If possible, slide or crawl along the floor to the nearest couch or chair and try to get up.
- If you are badly injured, do not try to get up. Instead, call for help from a family member or close neighbor.
- If you are alone, crawl slowly to the telephone and call a relative, friend or 911.

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