

### Introduction

Falls can result in hip fractures, broken bones, and head injuries and significant loss of independence. Falls often trigger the onset of a series of growing needs. For those over age 75, fallers are more than four times more likely to be admitted to a skilled nursing facility. (Donald and Bullpitt, 1999)

And falls, even without a major injury, can cause an older adult to become fearful or depressed, making it difficult for them to stay active.

The good news about falls is that most of them can be prevented. The key is to know where to look

### Ask about their last eye checkup

- If your older loved one wears glasses or contact lenses, make sure they have a current prescription and they're using the glasses/c-ontacts as advised by their eye doctor
- Remember that using tint-changing lenses can be hazardous when going from bright sun into darkened buildings and homes. A simple strategy is to change glasses upon entry or stop until their lenses adjust
- Bifocals also can be problematic on stairs, so it's important to be cautious. For those already struggling with low vision, consult with a low-vision specialist for ways to make the most of their eyesight

### Enlist their support in taking steps to stay safe

For example:

- Ask your older loved one if they're concerned about falling
- Many older adults recognize that falling is a risk, but they believe it won't happen to them or they won't get hurt—even if they've already fallen in the past
- A good place to start is by sharing NCOA's Debunking the Myths of Older Adult Falls. If they're concerned about falling, dizziness, or balance, suggest that they discuss it with their health care provider who can assess their risk and suggest programs or services that could help

### Discuss their current health conditions

- Find out if your older loved one is experiencing any problems with managing their own health
- Ask whether they are having trouble remembering to take their medications—or are they experiencing side effects?
- Ask if it is getting more difficult for them to do things they used to do easily?
- Also make sure they're taking advantage of all the preventive benefits now offered under Medicare, such as the Annual Wellness visit. Encourage them to speak openly with their health care provider about all of their concerns

### Preventing Falls

**Falls:**   
**Reduce the Risks**

### Notice if they're holding onto ...

- Notice if they're holding onto walls, furniture, or someone else when walking or if they appear to have difficulty walking or arising from a chair, because:
- These are all signs that it might be time to see a physical therapist
  - A trained physical therapist can help your older loved one improve their balance, strength, and gait through exercise
  - They might also suggest a cane or walker—and provide guidance on how to use these aids. Make sure to follow their advice.
  - Poorly fit aids actually can increase the risk of falling

### Check their medications

- If your older loved one is having a hard time keeping track of medicines or is experiencing side effects, encourage them to discuss their concerns with their doctor and pharmacist
- Suggest that they have their medications reviewed each time they get a new prescription
- Some find it useful to use a spreadsheet to keep track of medications and schedules. Adding a timed medication dispenser that can be refilled each month by a family member can also promote peace of mind and ensure adherence to the prescribed regime
- **Beware of non-prescription medications that contain sleep aids**—including painkillers with “PM” in their names. These can lead to balance issues and dizziness. If your older loved one is having sleeping problems, encourage them to talk to their doctor or pharmacist about safer alternatives.

### Do a walk-through safety assessment of their home

There are many simple and inexpensive ways to make a home safer. For professional assistance, consult an Occupational Therapist. Here are some examples:

- **Lighting:** Increase lighting throughout the house, especially at the top and bottom of stairs. Ensure that lighting is readily available when getting up in the middle of the night
- **Stairs:** Make sure there are two secure rails on all stairs
- **Bathrooms:** Install grab bars in the tub/shower and near the toilet. Make sure they're installed where your older loved one would actually use them. For even greater safety, consider using a shower chair and hand-held shower



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