

Falls Prevention

Your safety checklist and guide



Queensland Government
Queensland Health

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Falls prevention

Did you know?

- A third of people aged over 65 years of age, and one half of people aged over 80 years have a fall at least once a year
- Some of these people have multiple falls
- One third of these falls require medical attention
- Half of all falls happen in and around the home.

A few simple steps can reduce your risk of falling. This checklist is a guide to those steps.

If you answer 'no' to any of the questions, the checklist suggests ways you can make your home safer. Most changes are easy and inexpensive.

It's up to you to take steps to prevent a fall.



Tick yes or no in the box next to the question and continue reading for suggestions on how to **reduce your chance of falling.**

Exercise

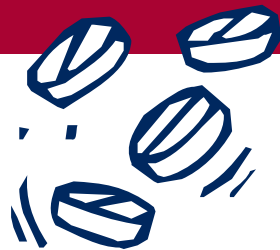
yes no

Do you exercise regularly (eg. walking, swimming, tai chi, yoga, aqua fitness, strengthening exercises)?

Exercise suggestions

- Think of movement as an opportunity not an inconvenience.
- Be active every day in as many ways as you can.
- Put together at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days.
- If you can, also enjoy some regular, vigorous exercise for extra health and fitness.
- Contact your doctor, physiotherapist or community health care worker for practical ways to improve your balance and be steady on your feet.
- Exercises that strengthen your thigh and bottom muscles and improve your balance will help reduce your risk of falling.





Medicines

- yes no Do you take four or more medicines?
- yes no Have you discussed all the medicines (including medicines from the supermarket or health food shop) with your doctor or pharmacist in the last 12 months?
- yes no Are you confident you are taking your medicine as prescribed?
- yes no Are all medicines stored in original, clearly marked containers?
- yes no Have all outdated medicines been discarded?

Medicines suggestions

Have your medicines checked.

- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about your medicines and ask them to review your medicines regularly. Always do this if you have had a fall or feel unsteady on your feet.
- Make an appointment with your doctor especially to talk about your medicines. Remember to bring all your medicines to the appointment.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist to arrange a **Home Medicines Review**. This is when a specially trained pharmacist visits you at home to discuss and review all your medicines. You will not have to pay for this service.

Ask about side effects and other medicines information.

For example:

- What can I do to reduce the chance of side effects?
 - Medicines are taken for particular conditions but there may be some ways to reduce possible side effects and the risk of falling. Sometimes you can be prescribed a different medicine.
 - Be aware that medicines can react with one another.
- Can you give me any information about this medicine?
 - Most medicines have **Consumer Medicines Information**, which is specially written to help consumers/patients.

Keep a list

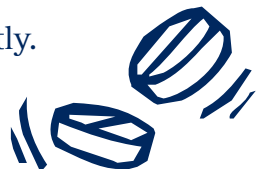
- Keep a list of all your medicines. Your doctor or pharmacist can print one for you. Remember to add any medicines you have purchased at the supermarket, from a health food shop or any other 'natural' medicines you may be taking at the moment. It is a good idea to include the strength, dose and directions of these medicines.

Read the label on your medicines.

- The label may include a warning that the medicine may cause dizziness or that it should not be taken with alcohol.

Do not use other people's medicine.

- Other people's medicine can affect you differently.



Remember:

Make an appointment to see your doctor if:

1. You take 4 or more medicines
2. You have had a fall in the last 12 months
3. You feel unsteady on your feet
4. You are afraid of falling.

Your doctor will try to find the cause of your symptoms and will check your medicines. If you agree, they can arrange to have a pharmacist (chemist) visit you at home for a free Home Medicines Review.



Clothing, feet and footwear

- yes no Do you have foot pain that affects your walking?
- yes no Do your shoes have a firm, non-slip sole that bends at the ball of your foot?
- yes no Is the heel of your shoe slightly rounded, broad and less than one inch (2.5cm) high?
- yes no Do your shoes fit well and are they in good repair?
- yes no Do you avoid wearing slippers or scuffs?
- yes no Does your clothing fit securely with no dangling hems or cords that could cause a fall?
- yes no Do you sit when dressing?

Clothing, feet and footwear suggestions

- Ensure your shoes are in a good state of repair.
- Avoid wearing socks without shoes, loose fitting slippers, shoes with slippery soles, high heels or pointed toes. These features of a shoe can add to your risk of falling.
- Features of a shoe that will reduce your risk of falling are:
 - A broad, slightly rounded heel less than one inch (2.5cm) high
 - A firm, flat, non-slip sole that bends mainly at the ball of the foot.
- Clothing should be short enough to avoid slipping or tripping on it.
- Sit down, rather than stand on one leg, when dressing.



Vision

yes no Have you had your eyes examined in the last 12 months?

yes no Do you make sure you don't walk in bifocal or multifocal glasses?

yes no Do you regularly clean your glasses?

These pictures show how some eye conditions can affect your vision. Remember that changes to your vision can happen slowly over time and can be difficult to notice.

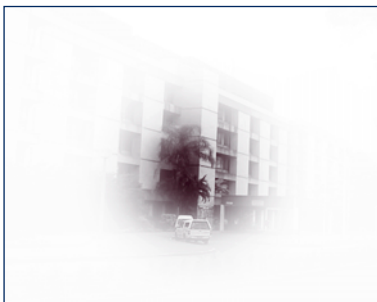
Normal



Cataracts



Glaucoma

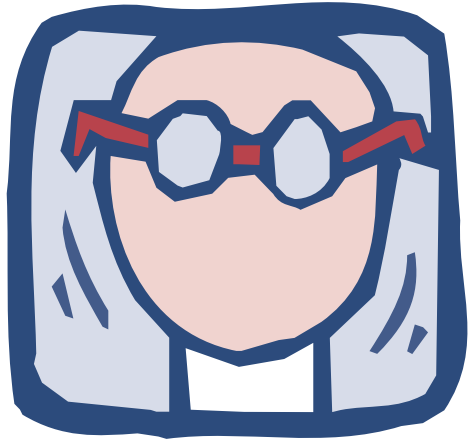


Age-related maculopathy



Vision suggestions

- Have your eyes checked every 12 months. Many changes in your vision happen gradually and are not always noticeable. Medicare will pay for a vision assessment by an Optometrist every two years. More frequent visits will usually cost a small amount.
- Wear distance glasses if needed when you are walking (not bifocals or multifocals).
- Wear a hat and/or sunglasses when you are outside to reduce glare and make it easier to see.
- Take care when you walk outside at night or at dusk.
- Turn on the lights and wear your distance glasses when you walk in the house at night.
- Keep your glasses nearby and clean them regularly.



Osteoporosis and nutrition

- yes no Have you become shorter over the years?
Do you have back pain that started suddenly?
Have you had any broken bones in the past few years?
- yes no Do you do weight-bearing exercise three to four times a week? (That is exercise in which you support your own weight such as walking, dancing etc.)
- yes no Do you have three to four servings of high calcium foods each day (eg. milk, yoghurt, cheese, salmon or sardines)?

Osteoporosis and nutrition suggestions

- If you answered yes to the first question you may qualify for medicine to reduce osteoporosis. Discuss this with your doctor.
- Be active every day in as many ways as you can – especially activity where you are putting weight through your legs.
- Eat three to four servings of high calcium food each day (eg. milk, yoghurt, cheese, salmon or sardines). See your doctor or dietician for further advice.



Continence

yes no

Do you sometimes need to rush to go to the toilet?

yes no

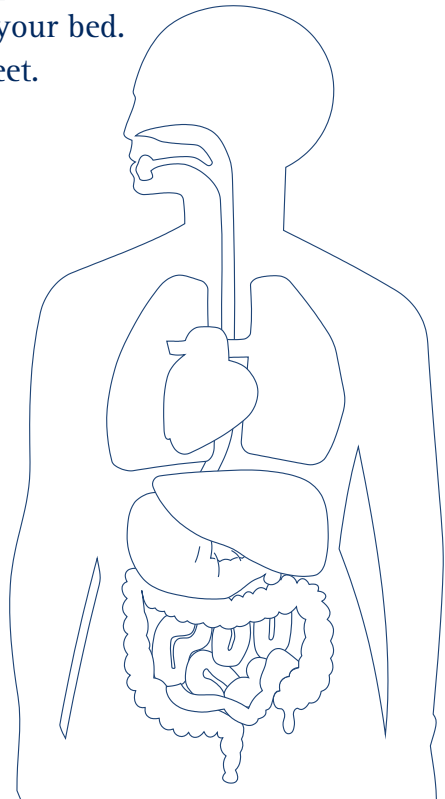
Do you sometimes lose control of your bladder or bowel?

yes no

Do you sometimes wet the bed at night?

Continence suggestions

- Incontinence can be a common problem as you grow older. Your doctor or health care professional can help you.
- Consider wearing continence pads.
- Consider a commode next to your bed.
- Consider a waterproof bed sheet.



Other

yes no

Do you ask someone to help you with odd jobs that are up high?

yes no

If you do odd jobs up high, do you use a sturdy stepladder with handrails rather than a chair or piece of furniture?

yes no

Do you have pets moving around your home?

yes no

Is your walking aid (if used) in good repair and safe to use?

yes no

Do you know where to get your walking aid (if used) repaired?

Other suggestions

- Many falls result from trying to do jobs that are hard to reach. Do not climb up if you feel unsteady. Consider asking someone else to do high jobs for you.
- If you must reach up to do high jobs, use a sturdy stepladder with handrails.
- Be aware of where your pets are so you don't fall over them.
- Replace or repair walking aids that are deteriorating or feel unsteady.



Falls Prevention:

Around your home



Bedroom

yes no

Can you turn on a light before you get out of bed?

yes no

Can you easily get in and out of your bed?

yes no

Do you have a telephone by your bed?

yes no

Is your electric blanket cord safely secured so you don't trip? Is the control easy to reach from the bed?

yes no

Is your bedspread clear of the floor, so that you don't trip on it?

yes no

If you use walking aids, are they easy to reach before you get out of bed?



Bedroom suggestions

- Have a light within reach of your bed. Consider a touch lamp or night lamp.
- Your bed should be at a height that is easy for you to get on and off. A firm mattress provides support. This will make getting in and out of bed easier.
- Get out of bed slowly - roll to your side then sit up before you stand.
- If you are feeling dizzy after sitting up, wiggle your feet for a few minutes and wait for any dizziness to settle completely before standing.
- If you are having difficulty getting on or off your bed, talk with your doctor, an occupational therapist or community nurse.
- Keep a torch next to your bed at night.
- Keep the floors clear in your bedroom. Loose mats, furniture and other obstacles can cause a fall.
- Secure loose telephone and electrical cords in the bedroom and out of walkways. They may need to be taped firmly down.
- If you wear glasses, make sure they are easy to reach as you get out of bed.



Bathroom and toilet

- yes no Do you use non-slip floor mats in your bathroom?
- yes no Are the soap, shampoo and towel within easy reach so that you don't have to bend or reach too far?
- yes no Are you able to get out of the bath or shower without holding onto taps or towel rails?
- yes no Do you have handrails in the bath and shower?
- yes no Are you able to get on and off the toilet easily?
- yes no Are you able to walk directly into your shower without stepping over a raised edge?

Bathroom and toilet suggestions

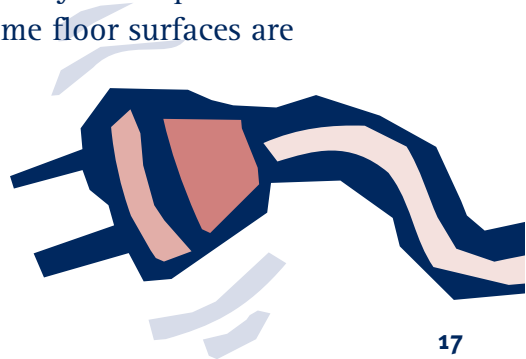
- Wet areas are more likely to be slippery and dangerous. Take extra care if the floor is wet.
- Non-slip flooring is recommended for bathrooms. Painted or self-adhesive non-slip strips are advisable in the shower and bath.
- Handrails are recommended around the bath and toilet where you need something to hold.
- Occupational therapists or your local community health centre can advise you on equipment and changes that you can make to your bathroom. This will improve your safety and independence.

Floors

- yes no Do your floor coverings lie flat without wrinkles or curled edges?
- yes no Do loose mats have a non-slip backing?
- yes no Do you clean up spills as soon as they happen?
- yes no Are your floors free of clutter?
- yes no Are all cords safely away from walkways?
- yes no Are your floor surfaces non-slip?

Floors suggestions

- You are less likely to slip on surfaces such as carpet or unglazed tiles. Polished floors and shiny tiles can be very slippery.
- There are also non-slip products from hardware stores to make your floors less slippery.
- Remove all loose mats or make sure they are firmly secured and are non-slip.
- Make sure your carpets are in good condition. You can trip on holes and curled up edges of your carpet.
- Wipe up spills straight away. Some floor surfaces are very slippery when they are wet.





Lighting

- yes no Are your lights bright enough for you to see well?
- yes no Are your stairs and steps well lit?
- yes no Are your light switches easy to reach and near each doorway?
- yes no Can you switch on a light from your bed easily?
- yes no Is there good lighting where you keep medicines?

Lighting suggestions

- 75 watt globes are recommended in all rooms, passageways and stairwells. (Note that some light fittings take a maximum of 60 watts).
- Nightlights are an inexpensive way to light up dark passageways at night.
- Consider installing movement-activated lights in your hallways.
- Automatic lights that turn on when it gets dark are also available. These are called photoelectric or light activated lights.
- Have extra lights installed or put lamps in dark areas.
- Allow time for your eyes to adjust when you walk between light and dark areas.

Stairs, steps and ladders

yes no Are you able to see the edges of the steps clearly?

yes no Are stairs and steps well lit?

yes no Is there a light switch at the top and bottom of your steps?

yes no Are non-slip strips or paint used on the edges of each step?

yes no Are your steps in good condition?

yes no Do your steps have a sturdy handrail?

yes no Is your stepladder or step stool short and sturdy with anti-slip feet and handrails?

Stairs, steps and ladder suggestions

- Stairs may need extra lighting.
- Lights that turn on automatically are recommended.
- Place a brightly coloured strip on the edge of any steps.
- Make sure there are handrails on at least one side of all stairways.
- Handrails on both sides of steps are preferable where possible.
- Move frequently used items to within easy reach to reduce the need for ladders.
- Have someone with you if it is necessary to use a ladder.
- Ensure your stepladder is in good condition. Sturdy, broad-based ladders with handrails are recommended.





Kitchen

yes no

Can you easily reach kitchen items you use regularly without climbing, bending or upsetting your balance?

yes no

Is there good lighting over your work areas?

yes no

Do you clean up spills straight away?

yes no

Is there good ventilation to reduce the risk of your glasses fogging up?

Kitchen suggestions

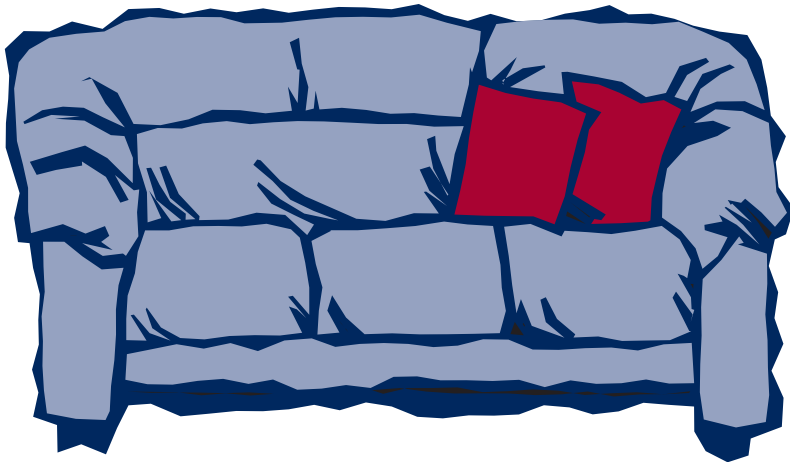
- Arrange your kitchen so the most frequently used items are easy to reach.
- A traymobile or trolley lets you transport items more safely.
- Counters and tables should be sturdy enough to support your weight if you lean on them. Collapsible tables such as a card table should not be used.
- Rangehoods, vents or exhaust fans can be installed to provide better ventilation when cooking.
- Wall ovens at waist height are better than low ovens.
- Use a broad-based, sturdy and secure ladder with handrails if it is absolutely necessary to reach high places.

Lounge room

- yes no Can you get out of your lounge chair easily?
- yes no Are all cords, furniture and clutter kept away from walkways?
- yes no Is your furniture placed so that you don't have to stretch or lean too far to open windows?

Lounge room suggestions

- Higher chairs and chairs with solid armrests are easier to get in and out of.
- Avoid rushing to answer the phone.
- Keep telephone and electrical cords clear of walkways.
- Fans and heaters should not be placed in walkways or in the middle of the room.
- Remove loose rugs or apply non-slip backing or secure by another means.

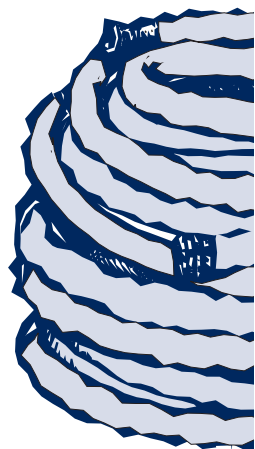


Outside your house

- yes no Are the edges of your steps clearly marked?
- yes no Do the edges of your steps have an adhesive, non-slip strip?
- yes no Do your steps have a sturdy, easy-to-grip handrail?
- yes no Are the paths around your house in good repair?
- yes no Are the paths and entrances well lit at night?
- yes no Is your garden kept free of hazards (like tools and hoses)?
- yes no Are your garage floors free from grease and oil?
- yes no Are the public areas around your house (eg. footpaths) in good repair?

Outside your house – suggestions

- Make sure all outside steps are easy to see by painting the front edge of the step a contrasting colour or by putting on non-slip strips.
- Paths need to be even and unbroken. Contact your local council to advise them of problem areas near your home.
- Keep paths free of moss and leaves, and take extra care in wet conditions.



- Walk carefully near pets or small animals, their movement can be unpredictable.
- Use a hose reel to store your garden hose.
- Store garden tools safely.
- Many falls result from the use of ladders. Be extremely careful. If you cannot get someone else to assist you, make sure you follow all safety instructions.



Write the **phone numbers**
of services that can **help**:

Community health centre _____

Dietician _____

Doctor _____

Home maintenance service _____

Occupational therapist _____

Optometrist _____

Pharmacist _____

Physiotherapist _____

Podiatrist _____

Specialist doctor _____

Relative/friend/carer _____

Emergency _____

Acknowledgments:

The Quality Improvement and Enhancement Program's Falls Prevention for Public Hospitals and State Government Residential Aged Care Facilities Project acknowledges the following sources of this resource:

Falls prevention: Your home safety checklist. [Online], Available: <http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/health-public-affairs/mhcs/publications/5415.html> [Accessed April 2003].

National Physical Activity Guidelines [Online], Available: <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/npag/> [Accessed April 2003].

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Podiatry, School of Public Health, Faculty of Health, Queensland University of Technology.

Queensland Health Promotion Council. *Checklist to help prevent falls.* (1997) An initiative of the Stepping Out Project under the auspices of the Blue Nursing Service.

Queensland Health Promotion Council. *Checklist to help prevent falls in the home.* (1997) An initiative of the Stepping Out Project under the auspices of the Blue Nursing Service.

School of Optometry, Faculty of Health, Queensland University of Technology.

This booklet was developed as part of the Quality Improvement and Enhancement Program's Falls Prevention for Public Hospitals and State Government Residential Aged Care Facilities Project.