



# How to prevent slips, trips and falls

**Smart, simple steps to stay safe and injury-free**



# 6 steps you can take to lower your risk of falling

## Don't trip up your chance for a healthier, more independent life

Have you ever taken a tumble? Join the club. Every second of every day, somebody over the age of 65 falls to the ground. Most of the time, they get back up, dust themselves off and keep going.

Sometimes, though, falls can lead to serious injury or even death. One of every 5 falls results in an injury, such as a broken bone or head injury. Each year, more than 300,000 older adults take a spill that ends with a broken hip.<sup>1</sup> Ouch!

"Falls can leave you feeling isolated from the friends and social activities you enjoy," says Elizabeth A. Phelan, MD, founding director of the fall prevention clinic at Harborview Medical Center in Seattle. "A fall can rob you of your independence."

But falls don't have to happen. "There are a number of action steps you can take to avoid falls," says Dr. Phelan. Try these six tips to lower your risk of falling.



1

### Talk to your doctor about your risks

Your chances of falling go way up if you've fallen in the past year, if you use a cane or if you often feel sad or depressed. Your doctor can share ways to lower these and other risks.

2

### Get your eyes checked yearly

For older adults, poor vision doubles the risk of falling.<sup>2</sup> "Anything that interferes with your eyesight can be dangerous," says Dr. Phelan. "Even wearing the wrong glasses prescription."

Call your doctor if you notice vision changes. You may need cataract surgery or treatment for age-related macular degeneration.

1. Centers for Disease Control. Keep on your feet: preventing older adult falls. December 16, 2020. Available at: [cdc.gov/injury/features/older-adult-falls/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/injury/features/older-adult-falls/index.html). Accessed on August 31, 2021. 2. Centers for Disease Control. Vision impairment and older adult falls. August 10, 2021. Available at: [cdc.gov/visionhealth/resources/features/vision-loss-falls.html](https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/resources/features/vision-loss-falls.html). Accessed on August 31, 2021.



### 3

#### **Assess your gait**

Your doctor can do this during your annual wellness visit. “I watch patients walk to make sure their gait — the way they walk — is steady and strong,” says Sterling Ransone, MD, president-elect of the American Academy of Family Physicians.

If your doctor is concerned, they may send you to physical therapy and encourage you to exercise more, especially walking and lifting weights. Exercise helps strengthen muscles and bones. It also reduces the fear of falling, and that fear can actually lead to more falls.

### 4

#### **Check your blood pressure**

If your blood pressure is too low, there may not be enough blood getting to your brain, says Kathryn Boling, MD, a family physician at Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore.

“When you stand up from sitting in a chair or get out of bed, you might feel dizzy. Do it very slowly.” Medications and habits like drinking plenty of water can help keep your blood pressure normal.

### 5

#### **Review your medications**

“Any medication that affects your central nervous system can make you more likely to fall,” says Dr. Phelan. The nervous system is responsible for balance and movement.

Prescriptions for pain, sleeping, anxiety or depression can be risky. So can some over-the-counter medications like Benadryl, a common ingredient in allergy medicines that can make you sleepy or dizzy. Your doctor can help you adjust your meds and avoid their side effects.

### 6

#### **Pay attention to your hearing**

Good hearing can help you tune in to obstacles you might trip over, like pets or small children. It also helps you keep your balance.

“One study showed that when people with hearing loss got hearing aids, their balance improved,” says Dr. Phelan.<sup>3</sup> Hearing loss is treatable, so schedule a hearing test if you’re due.

3. Washington University. Hearing aids may improve balance. December 11, 2014. Available at: [source.wustl.edu/2014/12/hearing-aids-may-improve-balance/](https://source.wustl.edu/2014/12/hearing-aids-may-improve-balance/). Accessed on August 31, 2021.

# Fall-proof your home

A slip on a bathroom floor. A tumble down the stairs. A trip on a sharp corner. Falls can happen fast and without warning.

The good news: Small changes can make a big difference in ensuring a safe living space. Use this safety guide to injury-proof every room in your home.

## Bedroom

- Secure or hide cords that could present a tripping hazard.
- Place reachable lamps and light switches near seating areas.
- Secure or remove loose rugs.

## Bathroom

- Use nonslip bathmats.
- Install railings and grab bars.
- Buy a raised, padded toilet seat with handles.

## Living room

- Brighten up low-lit areas with night-lights or floor lamps.
- Ensure armrests are sturdy enough to handle your weight as you stand.

## Kitchen

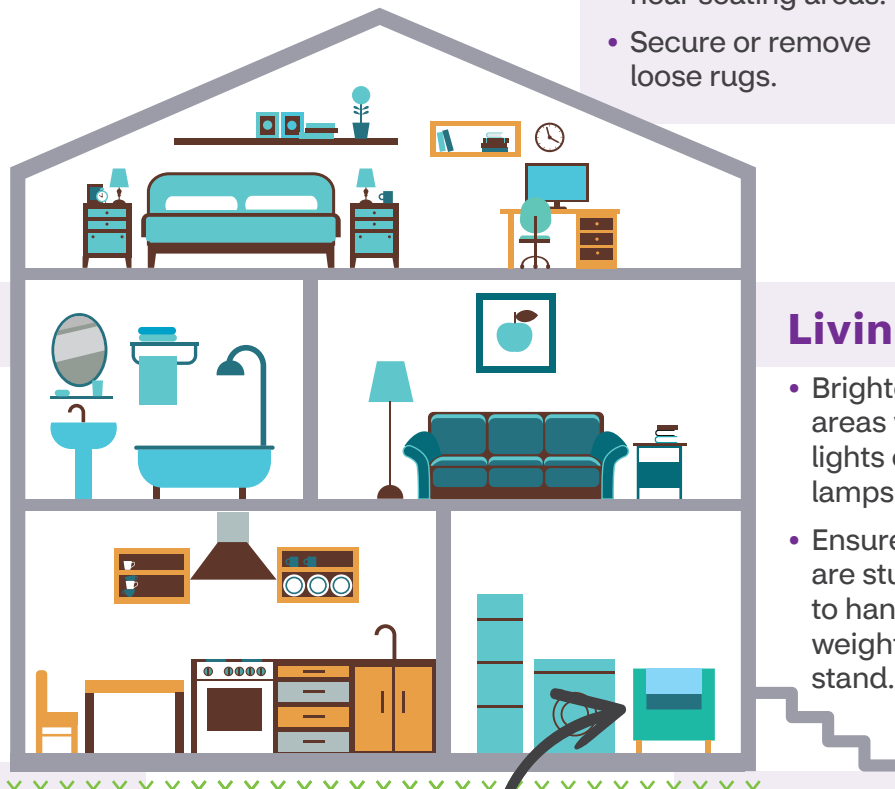
- Move the heaviest and most used kitchen items to the lowest shelves.
- Invest in a “grabber” device to extend your reach.
- If you use a stool, make sure it’s the heavy-duty kind with a strong center of gravity.
- Sit at a table to prep foods.

## Brace yourself

Place “braceable” objects, like a sturdy armchair, in all rooms. Dizziness upon standing is a leading cause of fainting.<sup>4</sup>

## Outdoor walkways

- Put nonskid treads on steps.
- Install motion-sensitive lighting.
- Clear clutter from the ground and walkways.

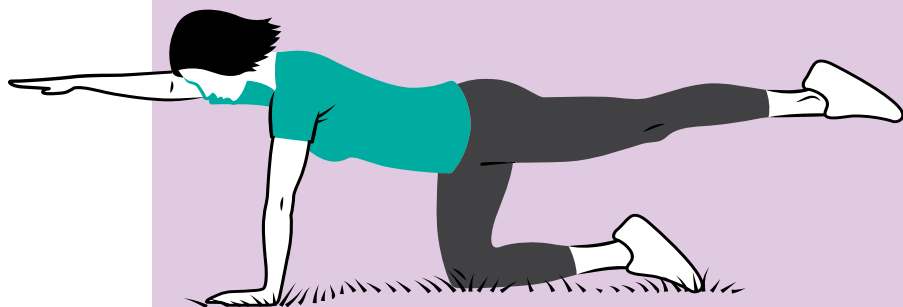


4. Johns Hopkins Medicine. Syncope (fainting). Available at: [hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/syncope-fainting](https://hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/syncope-fainting). Accessed August 31, 2021.

# 3 moves for better balance

“As we get older, our muscle density and elasticity diminish,” says Len Glassman, CPT, a master-level personal trainer in Garwood, New Jersey. That can affect balance and lead to a fall. But you can help prevent this by regularly performing exercises that can help you stay strong and nimble. To get started, try adding these moves to your routine.

# 1



## Bird dog

**Why it works:** This exercise strengthens both your core and hip muscles, which are key for stability, says Ryan Glatt, MS, a certified personal trainer at the Pacific Neuroscience Institute in Santa Monica, California.

- 1.** Kneel on an exercise mat or carpet with your knees and feet hip-width apart and your hands on the floor. Your hands should be under your shoulders, fingers facing forward.
- 2.** Raise your right arm and left leg, keeping your shoulders and hips parallel to the floor. Tighten your stomach muscles so that your spine stays in a neutral position.
- 3.** Lower yourself back to your starting position, then repeat on the opposite side.

# 2

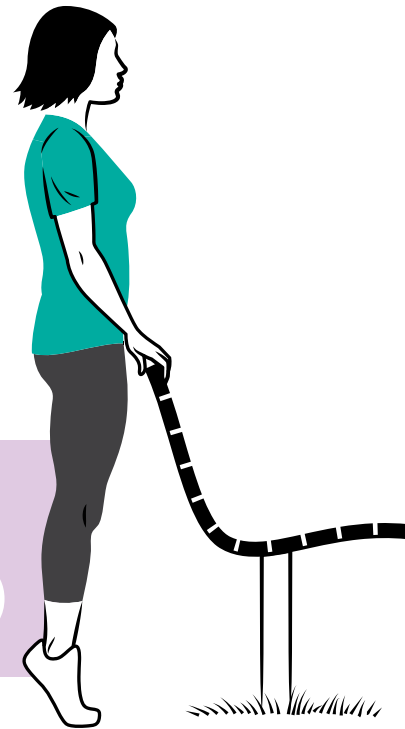


## One-legged stand

**Why it works:** This move builds balance by strengthening your lower-body and core muscles.

1. Hold on to a kitchen counter or the back of a chair. If you can balance for 60 seconds on each leg, move on to the next step. If you can't, continue to practice until you can.
2. Stand on one leg and fold your arms across your chest for as long as you can. It's a good idea to start with 10 seconds, then add 10 seconds at a time until you reach 60 seconds.
3. Stand on one leg and hold your arms out to the sides. Work your way up to 60 seconds on each leg.
4. Stand on one leg and fold your arms across your chest with your eyes closed. Work up to 60 seconds.

# 3



## Heel-to-toe raise

**Why it works:** You'll improve your dynamic balance with this exercise, which is your balance while moving, says Glatt. It also strengthens your calf muscles, which help you stay upright. "It's a good idea to have a wall behind you in case you fall backwards," says Glatt.

1. Stand with your feet a few inches apart, your hands on a counter or chair in front of you.
2. Raise your heels off the floor, keeping your knees straight. Hold for about 6 seconds, then lower your heels back down to the floor. Repeat 8 to 12 times.



# Power up your supper

There's no such thing as a "superfood" — everybody needs lots of different nutrients to stay healthy. But some foods are super important to keep your muscles and bones strong and help prevent falls. Try this simple, delicious recipe made with key ingredients to stay on your feet and on the go.

## Easy dinner nachos

Tex-Mex just the way you like it — only better. Made with lean beef and refried beans, these nachos are a great source of leucine, which helps build and repair muscles. Bonus: They're topped with calcium-rich, bone-healthy cheese. The stronger your bones, the lower your risk of a break if you do fall.

**SERVES:** 8  
**PREP TIME:** 20 minutes  
**TOTAL TIME:** 55 minutes

- 1/2 onion, diced
- 1 lb. lean ground beef
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 tsp. taco seasoning
- 2 (16 oz.) cans refried beans
- 1 (4.5 oz.) can chopped green chilies
- 1 1/4 cups shredded cheese, like a Mexican blend
- 3/4 cup mild salsa
- 1 (13 oz.) bag tortilla chips

Heat oven to 350 degrees. In a medium skillet over medium heat, heat 1/3 cup water. Cook onion, stirring occasionally until it begins to soften, about 3 minutes. Add ground beef, garlic and taco

seasoning, stirring to break up clumps of meat. Cook until meat is browned, about 5 minutes. Turn off heat and set aside.

Spread refried beans onto bottom of 9"x13" baking dish. Top with meat mixture. Sprinkle green chilies and cheese on top of meat mixture. Dot surface with salsa.

Bake until thoroughly warmed and cheese is melted, around 12 minutes. Serve family-style with chips and more salsa.

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**NUTRITION INFO PER SERVING:**  
462 calories, 21 g fat, 29 g protein,  
40 g carbs, 783 mg sodium

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**Aetna Medicare Preferred Plan (HMO D-SNP)**  
**Aetna Medicare PO Box 7405 London, KY 40742**  
**1-860-409-1221**  
**TTY/TDD 711**  
**California Relay 711**

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- **By phone:** Contact *Aetna Medicare Grievances* between 8 AM to 8 PM, 7 days a week, by calling **1-866-409-1221**. Or, if you cannot hear or speak well, please call TTY/TDD 711.
- **In writing:** Fill out a complaint form or write a letter and send it to:  
**Aetna Medicare Grievances**  
**PO Box 14834 Lexington, KY 40512**
- **In person:** Visit your doctor's office or *Aetna Medicare Preferred Plan (HMO D-SNP)* and say you want to file a grievance.
- **Electronically:** Visit *Aetna Medicare Preferred Plan (HMO D-SNP)* website at [www.AetnaMedicare.com](http://www.AetnaMedicare.com)

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You can also file a civil rights complaint with the California Department of Health Care Services, Office of Civil Rights by phone, in writing, or electronically:

- **By phone:** Call **916-440-7370**. If you cannot speak or hear well, please call **711 (Telecommunications Relay Service)**.
- **In writing:** Fill out a complaint form or send a letter to:

**Deputy Director, Office of Civil Rights**  
**Department of Health Care Services**  
**Office of Civil Rights**  
**P.O. Box 997413, MS 0009**  
**Sacramento, CA 95899-7413**

Complaint forms are available at [http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/Pages/Language\\_Access.aspx](http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/Pages/Language_Access.aspx).

- **Electronically:** Send an email to [CivilRights@dhcs.ca.gov](mailto:CivilRights@dhcs.ca.gov).

## **OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS – U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

If you believe you have been discriminated against on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability or sex, you can also file a civil rights complaint with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights by phone, in writing, or electronically:

- **By phone:** Call **1-800-368-1019**. If you cannot speak or hear well, please call **TTY/TDD 1-800-537-7697**.
- **In writing:** Fill out a complaint form or send a letter to:

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**  
**200 Independence Avenue, SW**  
**Room 509F, HHH Building**  
**Washington, D.C. 20201**

Complaint forms are available at <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/office/file/index.html>.

- **Electronically:** Visit the Office for Civil Rights Complaint Portal at <https://ocrportal.hhs.gov/ocr/portal/lobby.jsf>.