



Multiple Sclerosis: Preventing Falls

Falling can be a common complication for people with multiple sclerosis (MS) who suffer from the health-related symptoms often associated with the disease process. These may include:

- muscle weakness
- "drop foot"
- poor balance
- spasticity/muscle tightness
- fatigue
- cognitive deficits
- dizziness
- decreased vision

Falls can also be caused by environmental or situational hazards such as slippery surfaces, obstructions, clutter, unsecured rugs, poor footwear, hurried or careless movements, and walking without recommended mobility aids.

Some medications can cause dizziness, balance problems, confusion, or drowsiness which can increase your risk of falling. Research shows that people taking four or more medications are at a greater risk for falls.

Here are some recommendations to help minimize your risk of falling:

- Consistently use all mobility aids (cane, walker, rollator, leg/foot braces, wheelchair, scooter, etc.) as recommended by your health care provider. If you are falling or stumbling frequently, but do not have or use mobility aids, consult your doctor and discuss a referral to physical therapy.
- Consistently use other adaptive equipment as recommended: tub bench, shower chair, grab bars, bedside commode, or elevated toilet seat.
- Get rid of clutter and move furniture if necessary to allow ample room to walk.
- If possible, perform a task while sitting as opposed to standing.
- Make sure all rooms in your home have adequate lighting; use nightlights in your bathrooms and hallways.
- If you become fatigued walking from one room to another and are not using a rollator with a flip down seat, position chairs with armrests along the way so you can sit and rest.

- Place items you use most often within easy reach.
- Exercise regularly as recommended by your therapist.
- Use reflective or brightly colored tape on stairs.
- Install rails on both sides of any stairs.
- Remove throw rugs or secure them to the floor.
- Wear sturdy shoes with non-slip soles.
- If nighttime incontinence is an issue, consider using a bedside commode or make sure the path to your bathroom is well-lit and free of clutter.
- When making a turn while walking, slow down and take very small steps.
- Move slowly when changing positions and use deliberate, concentrated movements. For example, when rising from a seated position, wait 15 seconds after standing to begin walking.
- Use non-slip rubber mats and mount grab bars in your tub or shower.
- For added safety, especially if you live alone, consider using an emergency response system such as Lifeline. For Cleveland Clinic east side, call 1.866.674.9900, ext. 4484. For Cleveland Clinic west side, call 1.800.418.3837. The national phone number is 1.800.451.0525.

Equipment or installation required by a disability may be tax deductible within IRS rules and guidelines. You should obtain a letter from your prescribing physician, and keep a copy of your prescription in your file.

Remember, if you are falling or stumbling frequently, but do not own or use mobility

aids, talk to your doctor about a referral to Physical Therapy.

If you are having other issues related to mobility—for example, in the bathroom—and currently do not own or use any adaptive bathroom equipment, or if you have other potential falling hazards throughout your home, please talk to your doctor about a referral to Occupational Therapy.

If you have a prescription from your physician, you can call 1.216.444.8600 to schedule an appointment for Occupational or Physical Therapy at the Mellen Center.

You may also discuss a Home Safety Evaluation with your doctor to be performed in your home by a home health occupational therapist. This can be ordered by your physician through the Cleveland Clinic Home Care Services or a local provider closer to your home.

Recommendations for office visits

- If you require assistance from another person at home for walking, transfers, or using the bathroom, please bring a family member or caregiver with you to your Mellen Center appointments to assist you should the need arise.
- Also, if you use mobility aids at home — such as foot braces, walker, cane, or a wheelchair — please bring these to your appointments.