

Fall Prevention

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Did you know that on average, one out of ten people fall in the United States every year? One out of three of these falls are people aged 65 or older with an average of 10% of the falls in this age group being serious enough to require hospitalization. Falls are responsible for over 90% of broken hips every year and 16% of all annual emergency room visits. Almost 7% of all hospitalizations in the U.S. every year are from fall related injuries.

Increased fall risk may be attributed to health related symptoms. These may include:

- Muscle weakness
- Poor balance or difficulty with walking
- Foot instability or “foot drop”
- Fatigue
- Cognitive deficits or confusion
- Decreased vision
- Dizziness
- Postural hypotension or your blood pressure dropping too quickly upon standing of which may cause dizziness or loss of consciousness

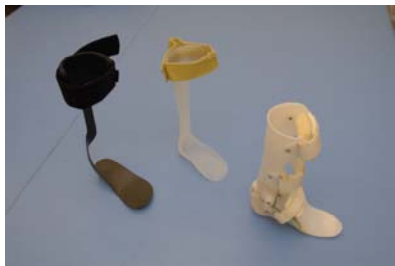
Falls can also be caused by environmental or situational hazards such as:

- Slippery surfaces
- Obstructions
- Clutter
- Unsecured rugs
- Poor foot wear
- Hurried or careless movements
- Walking without recommended mobility aids.

Some medications can cause dizziness, balance problems, confusion, or drowsiness which may increase your risk of falling. Research shows that people taking 4 or more medications are at a greater risk for falls. If you think the number of medications or the possible combined side effects of your medications may be putting you at a higher risk for falling, please consult your physician.

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

- First of all, consistently use all mobility aids as recommended by your health care provider. These may include a cane, a walker, a rollator, leg or foot braces, a manual or power wheelchair, or a power scooter. Consistently use other adaptive equipment if recommended such as a tub bench or shower chair, non-slip tub mats, an elevated toilet seat, and mount grab bars in tub/shower and by toilet if necessary. 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. If you are unable to stand or usually require assistance from a caregiver for transfers, please consistently use transfer aids such as a sliding board, a gait belt, a pivot disc, or a hoist lift if recommended. If you are falling or stumbling frequently, but do not have or use mobility aids, transfer aids, or possible adaptive bathroom equipment, please consult your physician and discuss a referral to physical therapy and/or occupational therapy.
- Another recommendation is to 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. Also, when making a turn while walking, slow down and take very small steps. People frequently fall when trying to make a turn.





Other recommendations include:

- 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.
- Get rid of clutter and move furniture if necessary to allow ample room to walk.
- If you have visual problems, make sure all rooms have adequate lighting and use nightlights in bathrooms and hallways. You can also use reflective or brightly colored tape on stairs.
- Place items you use most often within easy reach.
- If possible, perform a task while sitting as opposed to standing.
- Install rails on both sides of any stairs.
- Remove throw rugs or secure them to the floor.
- Wear sturdy shoes with non-slip soles.

For added safety, especially if you live alone, consider installing and using an emergency response system.

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 you have other potential safety concerns within the home, please discuss with your doctor a possible referral to Occupational Therapy. After you receive your therapy prescription from your physician, you may call 216-444-8600 to schedule an appointment with either Physical or Occupational Therapy here at the Mellen Center.