



Active Living Tips for Older Adults

Practical, leading edge research results applied to physical activity for older adults, in plain language for health practitioners and leaders. Sponsored by the Active Living Coalition for Older Adults (ALCOA).

Preventing Falls in Older Adults

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You may have a friend or relative who has recently fallen, or perhaps you have had a fall yourself. The consequences could be major - broken wrist, leg, hip, and even a head injury. It can take a long time to recover, especially for older adults. Some injuries may restrict your movements and your daily activities and keep you from living as independently as you would like.

There can be many causes of a fall, ranging from a medical problem to slipping in the bathtub. Research shows that many of the causes of falls can be prevented or treated.

You need to be especially careful if you:

- Have fallen in the past year, or come close to falling but caught yourself in time.
- Are taking prescription medication for depression, anxiety, or to help you sleep.

- Ever feel like you are losing your balance due to weakness in your legs.
- Sometimes feel lightheaded or dizzy when you sit or stand up quickly.
- Experience sore and uncomfortable feet when you walk.
- Recently started taking a new medication.
- Are overdue to have your eyesight checked.
- Are experiencing problems with your feet, such as calluses, that prevent you from feeling the floor as well as you used to.

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Health practitioners, leaders and others please post, copy and distribute this article to older adults.

Things that can help reduce your chances of falling.

- Discuss the matter with your doctor or relevant health care professional.
- Get your eyes checked each year and get your glasses changed if necessary.
- Develop a good and safe program for staying active. The health benefits of active living are continually supported by research.
- Review the dosage and number of prescription drugs you are taking with your doctor or relevant health care professional.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Install grab bars to help you get in and out of the bathtub.
- Get help and advice from a qualified occupational or physical therapist.
- Make your home or apartment safer by removing tripping and slipping hazards.

Physical activity and falls prevention.

Research has shown that physical activity, sunlight and social activities are good for us. Combined with a healthy diet, particularly with Vitamin D and Calcium supplements, weight-bearing physical activity can help keep your bones strong to reduce your risk of fracture if you do fall.

In particular, Tai Chi and strength training are two weight bearing physical exercises that have been proven to be very helpful in preventing falls by helping to increase the strength of your legs, ankles and feet. They can also help to improve your walking stride and to help you keep a good sense of balance.

- If you are starting a physical activity program, discuss your plans with your doctor or relevant health care professional.

Have you considered using hip protectors?

These plastic shields fit in pockets in your underwear, right over your hipbone. Several excellent studies have shown that they can reduce your risk of hip fracture when you fall. Like seat belts, they can be a little uncomfortable in the beginning. Also, like seat belts, you have to wear them for them to do any good.

- Make sure that the physical activity program emphasizes safety and can be tailored to suit your needs. This is especially important if the activity is new to you.
- Get active and stay active to help strengthen your legs, feet and ankles, as well as improve your flexibility and balance.
- Get guidance from a qualified leader.

Your local seniors club or public health unit can probably help you find physical activity programs for older adults. If there aren't any programs for older adults in your community, see if you can get one started at the local seniors club, recreation department, college or university.

