

# Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”

## Home Safety & Falls

Falls are serious at any age, but especially for older people who are more likely to break a bone when they fall. Falls are the most common cause of nursing home placement. The risk of falling increases with age.

Falls and accidents seldom “just happen.” Regular exercise as well as regular eye and physical exams may help reduce the risk of falling. Getting rid of tripping hazards in the home and wearing nonskid shoes may also help. Getting enough calcium and vitamin D reduces the chances of breaking a bone if a fall does occur.

If the person in your care has osteoporosis, they are more likely to break a bone if they fall. Osteoporosis is called the “silent disease” because bones become weak with no symptoms. People often find out they have it when a strain, bump, fall, or even a cough causes a bone to break. Get the person in your care tested.

### Why Do People Fall?

Many people who fall, even those who are not injured, develop a *fear of falling*. This fear may cause them to limit their activities, leading to reduced mobility and physical fitness, and increasing their actual risk of falling.

Some of the reasons people fall are:

- Tripping or slipping due to loss of footing or traction
- Slow reflexes, which make it hard to balance or move out of the way of a hazard

- Balance problems
- Reduced muscle strength
- Poor vision
- Illness

The more medications a person is taking, the higher the chances of falling. Certain medicines increase the risk:

- Blood pressure pills
- Heart medicines
- Diuretics (water pills)
- Muscle relaxants
- Sleeping pills

Drinking alcohol also increases risk because it can:

- Slow reflexes
- Cause dizziness or sleepiness
- Alter balance
- Cause a person to take risks that can lead to falls

### Preventing Falls

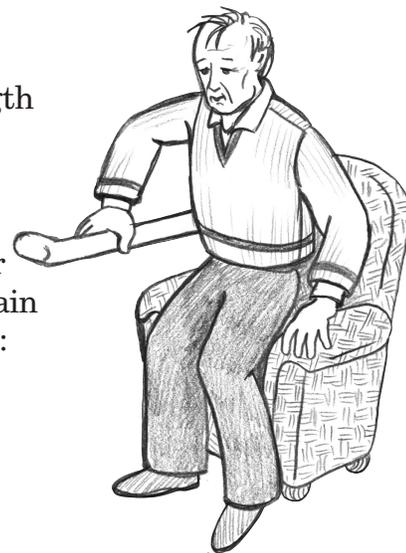
To reduce the risk of falls:

#### Outdoors

- Use a cane or walker
- Wear rubber-soled shoes that don't slip
- Walk on grass when sidewalks are slick
- Put salt or kitty litter on icy sidewalks

#### Indoors

- Keep rooms free of clutter, especially on floors and in hallways



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- Wear low-heeled shoes and do not walk in socks, stockings, or slippers
- Be sure rugs have skid-proof backs
- Be sure stairs are well lit and have rails on both sides
- Put grab bars on bathroom walls near tub, shower, and toilet
- Use a nonskid bath mat in the shower or tub
- Keep a flashlight next to the bed
- Add more lights in rooms
- Buy a mobile phone so that no one has to rush to answer the phone and so they can call for help if they fall



### What to Do If You Fall

How hard a person lands plays a major role in determining whether or not a person will break a bone. The greater the distance of the hip bone to the floor, the greater the risk of fracturing a hip, so tall people have an increased risk of fracture when they fall. The angle at which a person falls also is important. Falling sideways or straight down is *riskier* than falling backward on the buttocks.



Whether you are at home or somewhere else, a sudden fall can be startling and upsetting. If you do fall, stay as calm as possible.

Take several deep breaths to try to relax. Remain still on the floor or ground for a few moments. This will help you get over the shock of falling.

Decide if you are hurt before getting up. Getting up too quickly or in the wrong way could make an injury worse.

If you think you can get up safely without help, roll over onto your side. Rest again while your body and blood pressure adjust. Slowly get up on your hands and knees, and crawl to a sturdy chair.

Put your hands on the chair seat and slide one foot forward so that it is flat on the floor. Keep the other leg bent so the knee is on the floor. From this kneeling position, slowly rise and turn your body to sit in the chair.

If you are hurt or cannot get up on your own, ask someone for help or call 911. If you are alone, try to get into a comfortable position and wait for help to arrive.

Source: National Institute of Health

## Taking Care of Yourself— Exercises to Improve Balance

While holding the back of a sturdy chair, sink, or counter: Stand on one leg at a time for a minute and then slowly increase the time. Try to balance with your eyes closed or without holding on.

Stand on your toes for a count of 10, and then rock back on your heels for a count of 10.

Make a big circle to the left with your hips, and then to the right.

Do not move your shoulders or feet. Repeat five times.

Source: National Institute of Health



Note, age-related vision problems increase the risk of falling. Cataracts and glaucoma alter older people’s depth perception, visual acuity, peripheral vision and susceptibility to glare.

### Inspiration

Worry is interest paid on trouble before it comes due.

—Dean Inge

## Live Life Laughing!

Everything is so dangerous that nothing is really very frightening.



### Memory Care - Guard Rails

Guard rails on the bed may add to the risk of falls if the person with Alzheimer’s attempts to climb over them. A bed cane may turn out to be a safer alternative. It can offer support and increase balance. It is like a grab bar, with a wooden base that fits between the mattress and the box spring.

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## **SAFETY TIPS— Assistance Dogs**

Assistance dogs can make life easier for some disabled people. Service dogs help with physical tasks such as pulling wheelchairs, opening doors and offering payment at cash registers. Hearing dogs provide their hard-of-hearing partners with greater independence and security by alerting them to sounds such as sirens and doorbells. Skilled companion dogs work as part of a three-part team with an able-bodied adult, offering a sense of security to people with physical or developmental disabilities such as autism and early-onset Alzheimer's.

The young dogs begin training with professional instructors for six to nine months. Dogs that complete the training are matched with recipients, who spend two weeks training one-on-one with the dogs at a training facility. Disabled recipients are not charged for their dogs.

For more about assistance dogs, contact Canine Companions for Independence at [www.cci.org](http://www.cci.org) or call 1-800-572-BARK (1-800-572-2275).

# Caregiver Assistance News

“ C A R I N G F O R Y O U ... C A R I N G F O R O T H E R S ”

## Q U I C K Q U I Z

More than one-third of adults 65 and older fall each year in the U.S. Test your knowledge on how to make the home safer by answering True or False to the questions below.

1. To reduce the risk of falls, put salt or kitty litter on icy sidewalks.  
T F
2. A fall to the side generally causes fewer problems than falling backward on the buttocks.  
T F
3. Falls are the most common cause of nursing home placement.  
T F
4. Certain medications increase the risk of falling.  
T F
5. Many people who fall, even those who are not injured, develop a *fear of falling*.  
T F
6. If the person in your care has osteoporosis, they are more likely to break a bone if they fall.  
T F
7. Standing on your toes for 10 seconds and then rocking back on your heels for 10 seconds can improve your balance.  
T F
8. Guard rails on the bed may add to the risk of falls if the person with Alzheimer's attempts to climb over them.  
T F
9. Age-related vision problems, such as cataracts and glaucoma, increase the risk of falling.  
T F
10. Assistance dogs are only for blind people.  
T F

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_