

DON'T FALL FOR ME
BY: Melissa Jeremiah, RN, CHCE
Director of Hoosier Uplands Home Health and Hospice

Falls are a very serious matter. According to the CDC 1 in 3 adults aged 65 and older falls. Falls can cause injuries, such as hip fractures and head trauma, and can increase the risk of an untimely death. For adults aged 65 and up falls are the leading cause of injury death. In 2008 over 19,700 older adults died from falls. In 2009 2.2 million falls among older adults were treated in the ER, and 581,000 of these persons were hospitalized. The following measures should help you decrease your risk of a fall:

1. Let your healthcare provider know when you have fallen. The fall may be related to your medications, orthostatic hypotension or another medical condition.
2. Speak with your pharmacist and have them review your medications to see if you are taking something that may cause dizziness or drowsiness.
3. Take your medication as ordered by your healthcare provider, as this will help control symptoms that may increase your risk of fall.
4. Keep your eyeglass prescription current, and keep a pair of glasses at bedside.
5. Make sure you have adequate lighting in your home. Use nightlights to light the way to the bathroom. Keep doorways closed to basement areas, as many falls occur when a person mistakes the basement doorway for the bathroom and falls down the stairs in the dark. Keep stairways, halls and walkways well lit. Keep a flashlight handy in case of a power outage.
6. If your physician has approved it, exercise regularly. With increased exercise you can increase your bone mass, muscle strength, flexibility, balance and range of motion. Here are some exercise ideas: Walking, hand weights, join a health club or exercise at home with the help of television programs or exercise videos.
7. Get adequate calcium and vitamin D, from food and/or supplements.
8. Get rid of slippery rugs or floor surfaces and those multiple throw rugs that are scattered throughout your house. If you can't bear to part with throw rugs secure them with carpet tape or use a non-skid rug pad. Loose carpet edges should be secured with double-sided carpet tape.
9. Clean up spills as they occur.
10. Get a pick stick to pick up items that you can't reach, instead of climbing.
11. Keep stairs and walkways free of clutter. Keep lamp, extension and phone cords out of traffic flow areas. Arrange furniture so it is not an obstacle.
12. Keep small pets from under foot.
13. Repair any stairways that are unsafe. Edges of steps should be even and of the same size and height. You may also need to install a sturdy, hand rail, extending the length of both sides of your stairway.
14. Ice and snow need to be removed from steps and walkways.
15. Wear sensible shoes. Wear sturdy, non-slip shoes at all times, with less than a half inch heel, even when in the house. Shoes should be firmly fastened with velcro closings or cotton laces.
16. Install sturdy grab bars inside your tub or shower. Tubs/showers should also have non-skid mats or non-slip surfaces. You may also want to install grab bars near the toilet, and have an elevated toilet seat.