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Falls Prevention INFORMATION PACKET

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The Summit Senior Coalition is proud to offer this packet of information for your use. We've collected resources from local offices and website from around the internet. We believe this is a good start to building your toolkit as you research the topic.

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How to Use This Packet

Every 11 seconds, an older adult is treated for a fall in the emergency room . You don't have to be one of them. Using proven techniques, you can train your body and mind to avoid falls. Learn what is true about falls and what is not on pages 3-4. Learn how you can help yourself and your loved ones to avoid falls on pages 5-8. Find out where you can locally get guided assistance to learn techniques that will help you to avoid falls on pages 9-13.

1 <https://www.ncoa.org/news/resources-for-reporters/get-the-facts/falls-prevention-facts/>

Debunking the Myths of Older Adult Falls

Many people think falls are a normal part of aging. The truth is, they're not.

Most falls can be prevented—and you have the power to reduce your risk.

Exercising, managing your medications, having your vision checked, and making your living environment safer are all steps you can take to prevent a fall.

Every year on the first day of fall, we celebrate National Falls Prevention Awareness Day to bring attention to this growing public health issue. To promote greater awareness and understanding here are 10 common myths—and the reality—about older adult falls:

Myth 1: Falling happens to other people, not to me.

Reality: Many people think, “It won’t happen to me.” But the truth is that 1 in 4 older adults fall every year in the U.S.

Myth 2: Falling is something normal that happens as you get older.

Reality: Falling is not a normal part of aging. Strength and balance exercises, managing your medications, having your vision checked and making your living environment safer are all steps you can take to prevent a fall.

Myth 3: If I limit my activity, I won’t fall.

Reality: Some people believe that the best way to prevent falls is to stay at home and limit activity. Not true. Performing physical activities will actually help you stay independent, as your strength and range of motion benefit from remaining active. Social activities are also good for your overall health.

Myth 4: As long as I stay at home, I can avoid falling.

Reality: Over half of all falls take place at home. Inspect your home for fall risks. Fix simple but serious hazards such as clutter, throw rugs, and poor lighting. Make simple home modifications, such as adding grab bars in the bathroom, a second handrail on stairs, and non-slip paint on outdoor steps.

Myth 5: Muscle strength and flexibility can’t be regained.

Reality: While we do lose muscle as we age, exercise can partially restore strength and flexibility. It’s never too late to start an exercise program. Even if you’ve been a “couch potato” your whole life, becoming active now will benefit you in many ways—including protection from falls.

Myth 6: Taking medication doesn't increase my risk of falling.

Reality: Taking any medication may increase your risk of falling. Medications affect people in many different ways and can sometimes make you dizzy or sleepy. Be careful when starting a new medication. Talk to your health care provider about potential side effects or interactions of your medications.

Myth 7: I don't need to get my vision checked every year.

Reality: Vision is another key risk factor for falls. Aging is associated with some forms of vision loss that increase risk of falling and injury. People with vision problems are more than twice as likely to fall as those without visual impairment. Have your eyes checked at least once a year and update your eyeglasses. For those with low vision there are programs and assistive devices that can help. Ask your optometrist for a referral.

Myth 8: Using a walker or cane will make me more dependent.

Reality: Walking aids are very important in helping many older adults maintain or improve their mobility. However, make sure you use these devices safely. Have a physical therapist fit the walker or cane to you and instruct you in its safe use.

Myth 9: I don't need to talk to family members or my health care provider if I'm concerned about my risk of falling. I don't want to alarm them, and I want to keep my independence.

Reality: Fall prevention is a team effort. Bring it up with your doctor, family, and anyone else who is in a position to help. They want to help you maintain your mobility and reduce your risk of falling.

Myth 10: I don't need to talk to my parent, spouse, or other older adult if I'm concerned about their risk of falling. It will hurt their feelings, and it's none of my business.

Reality: Let them know about your concerns and offer support to help them maintain the highest degree of independence possible. There are many things you can do, including removing hazards in the home, finding a fall prevention program in the community, or setting up a vision exam.

Learn more about falls prevention at www.ncoa.org/FallsPrevention.



6 Steps for Preventing Falls Among Your Older Loved Ones

Did you know that one in four older Americans falls every year? Falls are the leading cause of both fatal and nonfatal injuries for people aged 65+.

Falls can result in hip fractures, broken bones, and head injuries. And even falls without a major injury can cause an older adult to become fearful or depressed, making it difficult for them to stay active.

If you have an aging parent, grandparent, or neighbor in your life, helping them reduce their risk of falling is a great way to help them stay healthy and independent as long as possible.

The good news about falls is that most of them can be prevented. The key is to know where to look. Here are some common factors that can lead to a fall:

- **Balance and gait:** As we age, most of us lose some coordination, flexibility, and balance— primarily through inactivity, making it easier to fall.

- **Vision:** In the aging eye, less light reaches the retina—making contrasting edges, tripping hazards, and obstacles harder to see.
- **Medications:** Some prescriptions and over-the-counter medications can cause dizziness, dehydration or interactions with each other that can lead to a fall.
- **Environment:** Most seniors have lived in their homes for a long time and have never thought about simple modifications that might keep it safer as they age.
- **Chronic conditions:** More than 80% of older adults have at least one chronic condition like diabetes, stroke, or arthritis. Often, these increase the risk of falling because they result in lost function, inactivity, depression, pain, or multiple medications.

6 Steps to Reducing Falls

Here are six easy steps you can take today to help your older loved one reduce their risk of a fall:

1. Enlist their support in taking simple steps to stay safe.

Ask your older loved one if they're concerned about falling. Many older adults recognize that falling is a risk, but they believe it won't happen to them or they won't get hurt—even if they've already fallen in the past. A good place to start is by sharing NCOA's [Debunking the Myths of Older Adult Falls](#). If they're concerned about falling, dizziness, or balance, suggest that they discuss it with their health care provider who can assess their risk and suggest programs or services that could help.

2. Discuss their current health conditions.

Find out if your older loved one is experiencing any problems with managing their own health. Are they having trouble remembering to take their medications—or are they experiencing side effects? Is it getting more difficult for them to do things they used to do easily?

Also make sure they're taking advantage of all the preventive benefits now offered under Medicare, such as the Annual Wellness visit. Encourage them to speak openly with their health care provider about all of their concerns.

3. Ask about their last eye checkup.

If your older loved one wears glasses, make sure they have a current prescription and they're using the glasses as advised by their eye doctor.

Remember that using tint-changing lenses can be hazardous when going from bright sun into darkened buildings and homes. A simple strategy is to change glasses upon entry or stop until their lenses adjust.

Bifocals also can be problematic on stairs, so it's important to be cautious. For those already struggling with low vision, consult with a low-vision specialist for ways to make the most of their eyesight.

4. Notice if they're holding onto walls, furniture, or someone else when walking or if they appear to have difficulty walking or arising from a chair.

These are all signs that it might be time to see a physical therapist. A trained physical therapist can help your older loved one improve their balance, strength, and gait through exercise. They might also suggest a cane or walker—and provide guidance on how to use these aids. Make sure to follow their advice. Poorly fit aids actually can increase the risk of falling.

5. Talk about their medications.

If your older loved one is having a hard time keeping track of medicines or is experiencing side effects, encourage them to discuss their concerns with their doctor and pharmacist. Suggest that they have their medications reviewed each time they get a new prescription.

My mom had an elaborate spreadsheet to keep track of her medications and schedules. Adding a timed medication dispenser that my sister refilled each month promoted her peace of mind and allowed us to ensure her adherence to the prescribed regime.

Also, beware of non-prescription medications that contain sleep aids—including painkillers with “PM” in their names. These can lead to balance issues and dizziness. If your older loved one is having sleeping problems, encourage them to talk to their doctor or pharmacist about safer alternatives.

6. Do a walk-through safety assessment of their home.

There are many simple and inexpensive ways to make a home safer. For professional assistance, consult an Occupational Therapist. Here are some examples:

- **Lighting:** Increase lighting throughout the house, especially at the top and bottom of stairs. Ensure that lighting is readily available when getting up in the middle of the night.
- **Stairs:** Make sure there are two secure rails on all stairs.
- **Bathrooms:** Install grab bars in the tub/shower and near the toilet. Make sure they’re installed where your older loved one would actually use them. For even greater safety, consider using a shower chair and hand-held shower.

For more ideas on how to make the home safer, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) offers a home assessment checklist in multiple languages.

NCOA, the Administration on Aging, and the CDC also promote a variety of community-based programs, like A Matter of Balance, Stepping On, and Tai Chi, that can help older adults learn how to reduce their risk of falling. Contact your Area Agency on Aging to find out what’s available in your area.



Falls Risk Reduction Clinic

Falls are one of the most prevalent issues aging adults face. In fact, studies show that one-third of patients over the age of 65 fall yearly, and falls are the leading cause of injury among older adults. In patients 65 years and older, falls account for nearly 80% of Summa Health System – Akron Campus' trauma injuries.

It is important to keep in mind falls are not a normal consequence of aging. Multiple risk factors such as muscle weakness, balance problems, vision/hearing loss, certain medications, cognitive loss and more can contribute to a fall. Every fall should be viewed as an opportunity to intervene to help prevent future falls, which may result in additional injuries, such as hip fractures.

If you have concerns about yourself or a loved one, help is available. Summa's Falls Risk Reduction Program, part of the Summa Health Senior Health Center, may be able to help you avoid falls in the future.

The program is run by a nurse practitioner who will conduct an initial assessment and ask about any previous falls and explore possible causes. The visit involves:

- A complete medical history
- A physical exam
- Assessment of gait, balance, range of motion and strength
- Assessment of sensation, vision and cognitive ability
- Review of medication use
- Evaluation of dizziness or vertigo (if present)
- Conversation about the home environment and offer of a home safety assessment to take place at a later date

The inter-professional team will review all assessment findings and generate a care plan to be shared with other providers. The team RN will follow up monthly by phone for two months and in the patient's home at three months.

To schedule an appointment for our Falls Risk Reduction Clinic - part of the Summa Health Seniors Institute located at Summa Health System – Akron Campus or Summa Health Wadsworth-Rittman Medical Center please contact 888.913.2591.



You Can Prevent Falls

Preventing Falls... One Step at a Time

Many people think falls are a normal part of aging. The truth is, they're not. Most falls can be prevented and you have the power to reduce your risk. Exercising, managing your medications, having your vision checked, and making your home safer are all steps you can take to prevent falls, and Direction Home Akron Canton Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities can help.

Steady U Ohio

Through a partnership with the Ohio Department of Aging, Direction Home Aging & Disabilities participates in the Steady U Ohio Initiative. Steady U Ohio is a comprehensive resource focusing on bringing falls prevention planning to individuals, families, health care providers, and more.

A Matter of Balance

A Matter of Balance is an award-winning 8-week program helping older adults reduce their risk of falls by breaking the "Fear of Falling Cycle". By emphasizing practical strategies and introducing movements to improve strength, flexibility, and balance, participants learn to see falls as controllable, set goals, and change their environment to reduce risk factors.

Tai chi: Moving for Better Balance

Tai chi: Moving for Better Balance helps older adults living in the community improve balance, strength, and flexibility. Over the course of 12 weeks, participants learn and practice eight Tai chi forms utilizing weight-shifting, body alignment, and coordinated movements performed in a slow, continuous, and flowing manner.

Both A Matter of Balance and Tai chi: Moving for Better Balance are held throughout Stark, Summit, Portage, and Wayne counties and are FREE to attend.

Did you know that 1 in 4 Americans aged 65+ fall every year?

- National Council on Aging





6 Steps to Prevent a Fall:

- Find a good balance and exercise program. Contact Direction Home Aging & Disabilities at (330) 899-5255 to find a class that works for you.
- Talk to your healthcare provider.
- Regularly review your medications with your doctor or pharmacist.
- Get your vision and hearing checked annually and update your eyeglasses.
- Keep your home safe
- Talk you your family members.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- One-fourth of Americans aged 65+ falls each year.
- Every 11 seconds, an older adult is treated in the emergency room for a fall; every 19 minutes, an older adult dies from a fall.
- Falls are the leading cause of fatal injury and the most common cause of nonfatal trauma-related hospital admissions among older adults.
- Falls result in more than 3 million injuries treated in emergency departments annually, including over 850,000 hospitalizations and more than 29,000 deaths.
- In 2015, the total cost of fall injuries was \$50 billion.
- The financial toll for older adult falls is expected to increase as the population ages and may reach \$67.7 billion by 2020.

Debunking a few Myths about Falls:

Muscle strength and flexibility can't be regained. While we do lose muscle as we age, exercise can partially restore strength and flexibility. It's never too late to start an exercise program. Even if you've been a "couch potato" your whole life, becoming active now will benefit you in many ways—including protection from falls.

Using a walker or cane will make me more dependent. Walking aids are very important in helping many older adults maintain or improve their mobility. However, make sure you use these devices safely. Have a physical therapist fit the walker or cane to you and instruct you in its safe use.

I don't need to talk to family members or health care providers about my concerns of falling. I don't want to alarm them and I want to keep my independence. Fall prevention takes a village. Discuss it with your doctor, family, and anyone else who can help. They want to help you keep your mobility and reduce your risk of falling.

Falls Risk Self-Assessment

For each of the following 12 statements, mark “Yes” if it describes you, and mark “No” if it does not describe you. When finished, total your score: each “Yes” = 1 point and each “No” = 0 points. If you score 4 points or more, you may be at an increased risk for falling.

1. I have fallen in the past year. **Why it matters:** People who have fallen are likely to fall again.
 Yes No
2. I use or have been advised to use a can or walker to get around safely. **Why it matters:** People who have been advised to use a can or walker may already be more likely to fall.
 Yes No
3. Sometimes I feel unsteady when I am walking. **Why it matters:** Unsteadiness or needing support while walking are signs of poor balance.
 Yes No
4. I steady myself by holding onto furniture while walking at home. **Why it matters:** This is also a sign of poor balance.
 Yes No
5. I am worried about falling. **Why it matters:** People who are worried about falling are more likely to fall.
 Yes No
6. I need to push with my hands to stand up from a chair. **Why it matters:** This is a sign of weak leg muscles, a major reason for falling.
 Yes No
7. I have some trouble stepping up onto a curb. **Why it matters:** This is also a sign of weak leg muscles.
 Yes No
8. I often have to rush to the toilet. **Why it matters:** Rushing to the bathroom, especially at night, increases your chance of falling.
 Yes No
9. I have lost some feeling in my feet. **Why it matters:** Numbness in your feet can cause stumbles and lead to falls.
 Yes No
10. I take medicine that sometimes makes me feel light-headed or more tired than usual. **Why it matters:** Side effects from medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.
 Yes No
11. I take medicine to help me sleep or improve my mood. **Why it matters:** These medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.
 Yes No
12. I often feel sad or depressed. **Why it matters:** Symptoms of depression, such as not feeling well or feeling slowed down, are linked to falls.
 Yes No

Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities Falls Prevention Workshops

A Matter of Balance (MOB):

MOB was developed for people who have had a fall or suffer from the fear of falling. Support and success are utilized to build confidence in your ability to manage your health and maintain an active and fulfilling life. Participants will set realistic goals for increasing activity, learn to assess the environment to reduce fall risk factors, and do simple exercises to increase your strength and balance. MOB is held once per week for eight weeks; each session is two hours.



Tai chi: Moving for Better Balance:

The second of our falls prevention workshops is Tai chi: Moving for Better Balance. Like the others, it is led by peer volunteers and focuses on building strength and flexibility to prevent falls. Over the course of the workshop, participants will learn the first 8 forms of Tai chi. This is by far the longest of our workshops in that it is a 12-week program held twice a week for an hour each session. Movements are able to be modified but participants should be able to walk.



Interested in attending a scheduled workshop or bringing one to your location?

Please contact Lori Smith, Training Coordinator
(330) 899-5255
lsmith@dhad.org

gettingwiser.org



Get Started

Our assistance is FREE
to residents of Summit County.

Contact us today
for an in-home assessment.

800.421.7277

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