

Be Surefooted

Fall Prevention Tips for the Elderly

Consequences of a Fall

According to statistics of the World Health Organization, falls are the second leading cause of unintentional injury deaths worldwide. The risks of serious injury or death arising from a fall increases with age. A fall can cause fractures, loss of mobility and decreased self-care ability. Elderly people may lose their confidence after a fall; as a result, they may limit their daily activities and social activities, leading to mood disorders. If unable to get up to seek help afterwards, a fall may even be fatal.

Despite the serious consequences of falling, there are many ways to reduce the chance of falling.



Do You Have These Fall Risks?

	Yes	No
1. Any history of falls within the past 12 months?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Do you suffer from the following medical conditions or symptoms : Stroke, Parkinson's Disease, Dementia, Diabetes Mellitus, Arthritis, Incontinence, Depression, Dizziness and Vertigo, Aches and Pains?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Do you require multiple long-term medications (e.g. blood pressure lowering drugs, psychiatric drugs) ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Do you have any vision and hearing impairment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Are you unsteady when standing up, walking or turning around?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Do you lack physical activity, endurance and balance exercises (such as Tai Chi)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Are there fall hazards in your home environment, such as having lots of clutter, placing frequently used items on the high cabinet, frequently wet floors and inadequate lighting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Do you wear clothing and footwear that increase your risk of fall, such as trousers which are too long, oversized shoes or shoes which have a slippery sole?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If your answer to any one of the above questions is "yes", you have a substantial risk of fall. You should consult your family doctor for a detailed assessment so that early preventive measures could be taken to reduce this risk, such as improving your eyesight/hearing, adjusting medication, managing incontinence, etc. You can also actively prevent falls by improving your home environment and by doing more physical activities, such as Tai Chi.

Below are some daily living tips recommended by occupational therapists.

Occupational Therapists will analyse the daily activities of the elderly in order to identify their risks of fall. The elderly will be reminded to avoid risky movements and taught to use special techniques to modify their daily habits. If there is a need, occupational therapists may arrange a home visit to assess the home environment, recommend modifications to their home environment, improve facilities and make good use of assistive devices to prevent falls.

Gentle Reminder : Fall Prevention Tips in Daily Life

Stability in self-care and household chores

- * Even at home, stay vigilant at all times to prevent falls. Don't perform too many tasks at the same time, or act hastily.
- * Slow down when changing body positions (for example, when you transfer from a sitting to standing position, turn your trunk, lift up your head, etc). Elderly with knee pains are advised to stretch their knees for a while before standing up.
- * Do not overestimate your ability. Sit down to perform tasks that require balance, such as wearing a pair of trousers.
- * Place a chair in the kitchen so that you can sit more and stand less.
- * Place items at reachable places. Place commonly used items (such as mobile phone, wallet and keys) at a height between your waist and your shoulders.
- * Avoid having to reach up or squat down frequently. You can use suitable assistive devices to reduce the risks of falling e.g. a long handled reacher, long handle cleaning tools, extended shoehorns, etc.
- * Avoid risky behaviour such as changing light bulbs while standing on a chair, or cleaning the exhaust pipes by climbing a ladder. Seek help when completing these tasks.



Removing traps in the home environment

Hallway / Floor

- Remove obstacles from the floor and keep the passageways free



Door Threshold

- Remove the door threshold or apply a non-slip strip with colour contrast as a visual cue



Chair

- Choose a chair with a suitable height and fixed at one location
- Avoid sitting on furniture that is not stable; such as chairs on castors or a low stool
- Choose chairs with armrests



Lighting

- Make sure there is sufficient illumination. Night lights should be installed
- Choose electrical switches with big on-off switches and place it somewhere convenient to use
- Install electrical sockets at a suitable height to minimise the need of climbing or squatting frequently



Bathroom

- Use non-slip floor tiles in bathrooms and toilets
- Keep the bathroom and toilet floors dry, and be extra careful when getting in and out of the bathtub
- Use suitable assistive devices, such as shower chairs, bath boards, non-slip mats and handrails etc.



If you have any questions on home modification, fall prevention measures or assistive devices, you should consult occupational therapists for their professional opinion.

Choose shoes and clothing wisely

- ✗ Trousers and skirts should not be too long or too wide
- ✗ Avoid walking while only wearing your socks (without shoes)
- ✗ Do not wear slippers, sandals with no heels, or shoes that are too loose for going out
- ✓ Purchase shoes with non-slip functions, match with suitable insole to strengthen the protection and stability

Suitable shoes



Lightweight design, provides adequate support, and has non-slip and shock absorbent functions



Tips for going out

- * Be alert when you are going out. Don't perform too many tasks at the same time, or act hastily. For example, stay alert for potential environmental dangers. Avoid being distracted by window shopping while walking.
- * Avoid using both hands to carry things, always have one hand free to react in case of emergency. Hold on to the handrails when climbing up and down the stairs, using the escalator or standing in a moving vehicle.
- * Elderly with dementia may have reduced ability to orientate themselves in an environment and make appropriate judgement. They have a risk of wander and get lost. They have a high-risk for falls and should be accompanied by family members when going out.



Good Helpers for Community Support

Use emergency alarm/safety phone

- * Elderly who live alone or are physically weak are advised to install an emergency alarm. The remote control should be carried at all times, even when going to the toilet or taking a shower.
- * Carers should visit them regularly to provide social support and maintain daily contact.
- * Elderly who frequently participate in outdoor activities can use a mobile phone or a safety phone so that they can have access to 24-hour emergency support services.



Use community support services wisely

- * If older adults find that they have difficulties in taking care of themselves or in managing household chores, they should discuss with their family members and apply for community support services; such as meal delivery services, escort services for medical consultation, temporary care services, day-care services etc. For more details, please call the Social Welfare Department hotline at [2343 2255](tel:23432255) or visit the Social Welfare Department's website at <https://www.swd.gov.hk>.

What to do after a fall

- * After a fall, stay calm and take a deep breath.
- * Assess the severity of your injuries, such as the functions of your head and limbs, and then slowly move your body.
- * Position yourself along the floor to a wall or a sustainable furniture (e.g. a chair or a bed), and stand up slowly with the support of the furniture.
- * If you are unable to stand up, try to make a phone call, press the emergency alarm, open the door or gates and shout for help.
- * If you are hurt, tend to your wound(s) first, and inform your family that you have had a fall. If you suspect any other injuries, you should consult a doctor for a comprehensive assessment.



Elderly Health Service, Department of Health
Website: www.elderly.gov.hk

Elderly Health Infoline: **2121 8080**

