

# Health Bulletin

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

#79 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues of pressing interest to all New Yorkers

## How to Prevent Falls

### A guide for older adults



• Available in Spanish, Chinese and other languages: call 311 or visit [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)  
• Disponible en español: llame al 311 o visite [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)  
• 需要中文服務 - 可電 311 或造訪網址: [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health)



## To prevent falls, take care of your health.

### Be physically active.

- Regular exercise improves mood and makes you healthier at any age. It's never too late to start.
- Physical activity helps prevent and control high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes and many other conditions.
- Exercise also lowers your chances of falling because it strengthens muscles and improves balance.
- Adults should get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity, such as a brisk walk, at least 5 days a week. But any amount is good — some activity is better than none!
- You can spread out your activity — you don't have to do it all at once. Just 10 minutes at a time is fine.
- Exercise that improves balance and coordination, such as Tai Chi, is especially helpful in preventing falls — but any kind of exercise is good.
- Ask your doctor or health care provider about the best type of physical activity for you.

### Ask your health care provider to review all your medicines.

- As you get older, medicines may affect you differently. Some medicines, or combinations of medicines, can make you sleepy or dizzy and can cause you to fall.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review all the medicines you take, including herbal remedies and over-the-counter



drugs. Your doctor can change your medicines and tell you if there are any you no longer need.

### Have your vision checked.

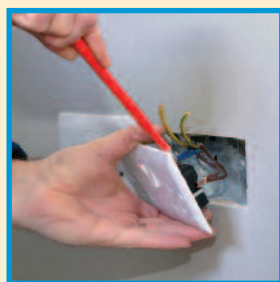
- Poor vision can increase your risk of falls, so visit an eye doctor at least once a year.
- You may be wearing the wrong glasses or have a condition like glaucoma or cataracts that limits your vision.



## Most falls happen at home among older adults. Use this checklist to make your home safer.

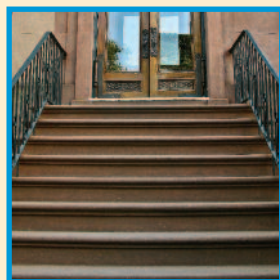
### Floors

- Furniture.** Is furniture in your way? Rearrange it so your path is clear.
- Throw rugs.** It's easy to slip on throw rugs. Get rid of them, or use double-sided tape or a non-slip backing to keep them in place.
- Clutter.** Are there papers, books, shoes, magazines, boxes or other objects on the floor? Pick them up!
- Wires.** Coil or tape telephone and electrical extension cords and wires next to the wall so you can't trip over them. Have extra outlets installed if you need them.



### Inside and outside stairs and steps

- Pick up papers, shoes and other clutter — always keep stairs clear.
- Have loose or uneven steps repaired.
- Make sure that carpet is firmly attached to every step. Or remove the carpet and use non-slip rubber treads instead.
- Have overhead lights and switches installed at the top and bottom of the stairs. You can get light switches that glow to make them easier to see.
- Replace burned out light bulbs right away.
- Have loose handrails fixed, or put in new ones. Make sure handrails are on both sides of the stairs and run the full length of the stairway.



### Kitchen

- Are the things you use the most on high shelves? Move them down, to about waist level.
- Step stools can be dangerous. If you must use one, buy a stool with a bar to hold on to. Never use a chair as a step stool!



## Bathrooms

- Use non-slip mats or self-stick strips in the bathtub and on the shower floor.
- Have horizontal grab bars properly installed next to the tub and the toilet.



## Bedrooms

- Place lamps close to the bed, where they are easy to reach.
- Is the path from your bed to the bathroom dark? Put in a night-light so you can see where you're going.



## Other Safety Tips

- Get up slowly after you sit or lie down.
- Wear shoes both inside and outside the house. Avoid going barefoot or wearing slippers.
- Improve the lighting in your home. As you get older, you need brighter lights to see well. Hang lightweight curtains or shades to reduce glare.
- Keep emergency numbers in large print near each phone.
- Put a phone near the floor in case you fall and can't get up.
- Think about wearing an alarm device that will bring help in case you fall.



# What You Can Do to Prevent Falls



- 1** Be physically active.
- 2** Ask your health care provider to review all your medicines.
- 3** Have your vision checked.
- 4** Make your home safer.

## More Information and Help

- **New York City Health Department:**  
[nyc.gov/html/doh/html/ip/ip-index.shtml](http://nyc.gov/html/doh/html/ip/ip-index.shtml)
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:**  
[cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/adultfalls.html](http://cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/adultfalls.html)
- **New York State Department of Health:**  
[health.state.ny.us/prevention/injury\\_prevention/](http://health.state.ny.us/prevention/injury_prevention/)
- **New York City Department for the Aging:**  
[nyc.gov/html/dfta/downloads/pdf/fallsandfractures.pdf](http://nyc.gov/html/dfta/downloads/pdf/fallsandfractures.pdf)
- **National Institute on Aging:**  
[nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/falls.htm](http://nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/falls.htm)

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## **How to Prevent Falls**

**DIAL  
311**

**For Non-Emergency NYC Services  
Telephone Interpretation in 170 Languages**