

PREVENTING PATIENT FALLS

What are the risks of falls?

The chances of injury from falling increase as one gets older. About half the falls older people have are due to accidents and about half are health-related. Most falls result in a quick recovery. However, some falls, particularly those that result in fractures, cause permanent disability and can even shorten lives.

Falls cause more bone fractures in older people because osteoporosis (weak bones) affects 1 in 4 women age 60 or older and nearly half of all people over age 75. By the age of 90, one woman in 4 has fallen and fractured her hip. A serious fall often results in a loss of confidence, fear of falling, and a dependence on others.

How do falls occur?

As we age, eyesight and hearing decline. Reflexes tend to slow. There is less coordination and muscle strength to take action in avoiding a fall. Medical conditions like heart disease or low blood pressure can affect balance. Medications or the use of alcohol may cause lightheadedness. Arthritis can throw a person off balance. In addition, people often aren't aware of the fall hazards they have in their homes.

IV poles, infusion pumps, and certain infusion medications will increase your risk of falls. Always review the Medication Educational material received with your first shipment of medication and supplies. If you have any questions regarding your medication please do not hesitate to contact our pharmacist.

Always be aware when walking with IV poles and infusion pumps. Clear the area by removing rugs and clutter. Use two hands or ask for assistance. Remember, the pole will be more difficult to roll over carpet or resistance may vary with change in flooring.

When infusion pumps are plugged in, keep the electrical cord clear of any walk through. When the pump is on battery, place the cord thru the hook on the IV pole to keep it out of your way or roll up and secure with Velcro strap.

What are the symptoms that may lead to falls?

Feelings of dizziness, lightheadedness, or weakness may be caused by underlying medical problems or a fall may be the first symptom of serious illness, such as a heart attack, stroke, internal bleeding, or pneumonia. It may also be the first sign of a serious drinking problem. A fall that causes a bone fracture may be the first sign of osteoporosis.

What should I do after a fall?

If you are injured after a fall, obtain medical assistance. Even if there appears to be little or no injury, call your doctor. If you have severe pain in your hip or groin, call an ambulance or emergency number and get immediate emergency treatment. It is possible to fracture a hip and still be able to get up. In addition, a fall may be the first symptom of other serious illness. Your doctor or an emergency department physician will examine you and may order x-rays or other tests.

How can I take care of myself to avoid falls?

- Have your vision and hearing checked regularly and, if necessary, corrected.
- Use a cane, walker, or walking aid if advised to do so.
- If you are on medication, take it regularly and as directed.
- Tell your doctor if you think your medication affects your balance or causes dizziness.
- Exercise daily to keep muscles in tone and help prevent osteoporosis.
- Eat calcium-rich food, such as dairy products and green vegetables, to help prevent osteoporosis.
- Discuss specific medications for osteoporosis with your doctor.

Preventing falls in your home

Homes can be full of fall hazards. Common ones include slippery floors, worn rugs and stair treads, furniture in the way, poor lighting, and trailing electric cords.

- Try to have non-slip floors. Use non-skid mats, especially on floors that may get wet.
- Carpet and stair treads should be tacked down firmly. Replace or cover worn areas on carpet or treads.
- Use good lighting. Have light switches at both ends of stairs and hallways.
- Have a small night light on in case you need to get up at night.
- Don't have loose or trailing electric cords across the floors.

- Arrange furniture so it is not in the way when you walk around the house.
- Install grab bars for the bathtub, shower, and toilet.
- Don't use a long bathrobe you can trip over.
- Store food and regularly used items where they can be easily reached.
- Use care when being mobile with IV poles and pumps.
- Keep electrical cords out of walkways.

Preventing falls in your daily activities

- Get up slowly after lying down or resting. Sit down if you feel lightheaded.
- Wear rubber-soled, low-heeled shoes that fasten securely.
- Exercise daily to keep muscles firm and joints flexible. Stop and rest if you feel faint.
- Limit your use of alcohol.