

Falls Prevention Week is September 22 to 28, 2018

Taking Steps to Prevent Falls as We Age

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*2017 NCOA Falls Free® Photo Contest Winner:
Asbury Harris Epworth Towers/Wesley Woods
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One in four adults aged 65 or older falls each year, often in or near their homes. While many falls are minor, an older adult dies from complications from a fall every 19 minutes. Falls are so common that if you are a caregiver of an older family members, I am sure you can relate to this issue.

An injury from a fall may sideline younger people for a few days or weeks, but recovery is usually quick and complete. But for older people like my grandma, the consequences of falls can become far more serious, setting up a sequence of events that can compromise independence and health.

Preventing falls can help older people continue to live independently in their own homes and communities.

Certain factors put older people at higher risk for falls. These include:

- **Physical health:** People with chronic diseases and poor physical health are at greater risk. Problems with dizziness, balance, vision, and other conditions can increase the risk of falls.
- **Environment:** Hazards in and around the home—loose throw rugs, obstructed pathways, difficult to access showers or bathtubs—make falls more likely. Or, wearing poorly fitted shoes, slippers, or shoes with limited support.
- **Behavior:** Lack of sleep, alcohol use, and lack of exercise all increase the risk of falls.

What can people do to prevent falls? Here are some tips:

- **Stay active:** Exercise helps increase or maintain coordination and muscle tone that can keep us steady on our feet and our reactions sharp. Walking, swimming, and taking exercise classes are just a few ways to keep the heart healthy and muscles toned. ACL-

supported programs offered by the aging network. Programs such as [Tai Chi: Moving for Better Balance](#) and Fit and Strong! can help.

- **Manage underlying chronic conditions:** The better a person's overall health, the lower the risk of falls. Chronic conditions like diabetes, depression, osteoarthritis, obesity, and high blood pressure can increase the risk of falls. Managing those conditions—by seeing a health care provider regularly, taking medication as prescribed, eating a healthy diet, and choosing appropriate exercise—can help prevent falls. The [Chronic Disease Self-Management Program](#) can help older people learn to manage their chronic conditions, communicate better with their doctors, and deal with problems such as frustration, fatigue, and pain. This peer-facilitated program is highly participatory, with participants learning from each other and working on goals that matter to them.
- **Review medications:** Side effects from and interactions with some common medications can increase the risk of falling. Regular conversations with health care providers and the pharmacist about all prescription and over-the-counter medicines can help avoid these problems.
- **Get an Eye Checkup:** Vision changes as we get older, so it is important to have a checkup once a year to make sure prescriptions are up to date and to screen for diseases of the eye, like cataracts and glaucoma, which usually are treatable when caught early.
- **Eliminate potential hazards in the environment.** A thorough assessment of a home can be a lifesaver. Enlisting the help of a family member or friend who doesn't live there is a good way to avoid overlooking things, too. Installing grab bars in the bathroom, getting rid of slippery throw rugs or adding a rubber backing to them, and keeping passage ways inside and outside the home well-lit and free from clutter and debris are simple things that can make a big difference.
- **Shoes Matter!!** Sensible shoes with a high back, hard, slip-resistant sole, and a low heel height (one inch or less) are best to wear outside. It's important to wear them properly, with the back of the shoe snugly behind the heel. Slipping into them part way may be convenient, but is unsafe – it is the back support that stabilizes the shoe and often prevents a fall. Shoes or slippers that are loose or ill-fitting, or with worn outer soles should be avoided. Also, shoes with smooth leather or plastic soles can be slippery, especially on wet floors.

The Administration for Community Living (ACL) is working with partners and people across the nation to realize our goal of making community living possible for everyone. ACL funds the [National Falls Prevention Resource Center](#), which is leading the way in helping our nation's older adults prevent falls. The National Falls Prevention Resource Center has developed excellent tools and resources for older adults, service providers, and caregivers who are looking to do more to prevent a fall. Check out this excellent webpage for tips, advice, and a great video- [Preventing Falls: Tips for Older Adults and Caregivers](#)

Falls are not a normal part of aging. This week is all about recognizing that falls are preventable and making changes to prevent them! Take action today by calling your local Area Agency on Aging, Council on Aging or Senior Center to find out programs available in your area.