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# Tompkins County **Falls Prevention Resource Guide**



TOMPKINS COUNTY  
OFFICE FOR THE AGING

*Aging Better, Together*

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NY Connects/Tompkins County Office for the Aging  
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Ithaca, New York 14850  
(607) 274-5482  
[www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa](http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa)

# Falls Prevention Resource Guide

## Titles in this booklet series\*:

- Housing for Seniors in Tompkins County
- Long Term Support Services in Tompkins County
- Resources for Caregivers in Tompkins County
- Tompkins County Fall Prevention Resource Guide

\*This entire set of resource guides and other publications of the Tompkins County Office for the Aging are available online at:

[www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa](http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa)

The sample exercises on pages 11-12 were reproduced with permission from *How to Prevent Falls*, 5th Edition by Betty Perkins-Carpenter, Ph.D., Senior Fitness Productions Inc., 2006.

The inclusion of a resource in this guide should not be construed as an endorsement of a program, organization, or product.

Unless otherwise stated, services and price levels described in this booklet are those scheduled to be in effect January 2022 and are subject to change.

This booklet has been prepared by the Tompkins County Office for the Aging.

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# GETTING STARTED

*“Falling is simply NOT a part of growing older.”*

– Betty Perkins-Carpenter, Ph.D.  
Author of *How to Prevent Falls*

Although one out of three people over 65 fall each year and one in ten falls result in hospitalization, older adults everywhere are discovering they can control their risk of falling. There are many things you can do on your own, starting today! This resource guide can help you:

- Reduce your risk of falling
- Increase your ability to remain independent in your own home
- Continue the activities that you enjoy

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## **Begin by doing a quick “Falls Risk” self-check:**

*Do any of the following apply to you?*

- I have had falls in the past year.
- I am afraid of falling.
- I take medications that make me feel unsteady, dizzy, light-headed or more tired than usual.
- I have difficulty moving around — negotiating stairs, getting in and out of vehicles.
- I need assistance with daily activities such as dressing, bathing, or walking.
- I use an assistive device such as a walker or cane.

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# Four Steps to Reduce Your Risk of Falling

## 1. Talk to Your Health Care Providers

If you checked two or more of the risk factors on the previous page, you may want to **talk to your doctor or physical therapist** about having a more comprehensive fall risk assessment done. The following are common conditions that can increase risk of falls:

- Vision problems
- Joint/muscle weakness
- Foot problems/improper footwear
- Arthritis
- Dizziness when you change positions
- Osteoporosis
- Incontinence
- Medication side-effects
- Neurological problems

Check your insurance plan to see whether you need a physician's referral to have an assessment done by a physical therapist. Check with your pharmacist or doctor to find out if certain medications are making you weak or dizzy.

## 2. Practice Strength and Balance Exercises

You are less likely to fall if your muscles and bones are stronger. Exercises can also improve your coordination, flexibility, and gait. If you avoid exercise because you are afraid it may lead to a fall, tell your doctor so he/she can recommend a program for you or refer you to a physical therapist who can devise a custom exercise program for you.

## 3. Make Your Home Safer

Most falls occur in or around the home. Remove hazards from your home, make necessary repairs or modifications, light up your living space and use properly-fitted assistive devices.

## 4. Have Annual Vision/Eye Exams

# STRENGTH AND BALANCE PROGRAMS

*Be sure to speak with your doctor or physical therapist about what type of program is right for you.*

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## Classes

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**Lifelong** (607) 273-1511

119 W. Court St.  
Ithaca, NY 14850

[www.tclifelong.org](http://www.tclifelong.org)

**Classes at Lifelong:** Enhance Your Fitness, Aging Mastery Program (AMP), Strength Training, Tai Chi, Yoga, and Square Dancing.

**Lifelong-sponsored classes at other locations in the county that are open to the public:**

- Brooktondale Fire Hall
- Jacksonville United Methodist Church

Other locations may be possible. Please contact Lifelong.

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**Finger Lakes Fitness** (on Ithaca Commons) (607) 256-3532

171 E. Martin Luther King Jr./State St.  
Ithaca, NY 14850

[www.fingerlakesfitness.com](http://www.fingerlakesfitness.com)

**Class:** Zumba

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**Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC)** (607) 272-3622

301 W. Court St.  
Ithaca, NY 14850

[www.cityofithaca.org/338/adult-program](http://www.cityofithaca.org/338/adult-program)

Programs are limited. Please call GIAC for updates.

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**Island Health & Fitness** (607) 277-3861

310 Taughannock Blvd.  
Ithaca, NY 14850

[www.islandhealthfitness.com](http://www.islandhealthfitness.com)

**Class:** Tai Chi

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**McCune & Murphy Physical Therapy****(607) 844-5653**

15 Ellis Dr.

Dryden, NY 13053

[www.ptithaca.com](http://www.ptithaca.com)**Class:** Ageless Fitness

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**TC3 Fitness Center****(607) 844-8211**

170 North St.

Dryden, NY 13053

[www.tc3.edu/student/rec\\_fitness\\_classes.asp](http://www.tc3.edu/student/rec_fitness_classes.asp)**Classes:** Senior Fit, Hatha Yoga

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**YMCA****(607) 257-0101**

50 Graham Rd. West

Ithaca, NY 14850

[www.ithacaymca](http://www.ithacaymca)**Classes:** Building Strength, Tai Chi, Gentle Yoga





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## Description of Strength & Balance Programs

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### **Ageless Fitness**

A program to improve strength, balance, coordination, reaction time and muscle mass. Includes initial individual screening tests.

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### **Tai Chi, Qi Gong**

**Tai Chi** is a series of slow and graceful movements that flow into each other. This low-impact physical activity helps improve balance, flexibility and muscle strength. Similar to Tai Chi, **Qi Gong** combines slow movements and can be practiced by individuals with different levels of physical ability.

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### **Chair Yoga**

Slow movements, breathing and balance exercises are performed while holding onto or sitting in a chair.

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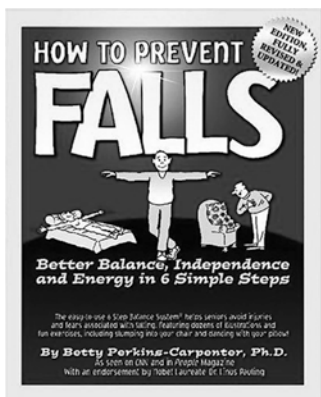
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## Programs for Use in Your Home

Your physical therapist or physician may provide you with a program or set of exercises for you to do or give you an exercise booklet.

**OR**

You can purchase a book or DVD that contains exercises such as:



### **How to Prevent Falls (book)**

by *Betty Perkins-Carpenter, Ph.D.*

138 pages

\$15.95 (book)

\$13.50 (DVD)

**Send check or money order to:**

Senior Fitness Productions, Inc.

1780 Penfield Rd.

Penfield, NY 14526-2104

1-800-306-3137

*To order online:*

[www.howtopreventfalls.com](http://www.howtopreventfalls.com)

**OR**

Use an online program from a reputable source such as:



### **Exercise & Physical Activity:**

**Your Everyday Guide from the National Institute on Aging**

Available at:

<https://go4life.nia.nih.gov/free-resources>

You can download the PDF from the website listed above

**OR**

order the printed guide from the website listed above

**OR**

pick one up at the Tompkins County Office for the Aging.

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## Sample Balance Exercises

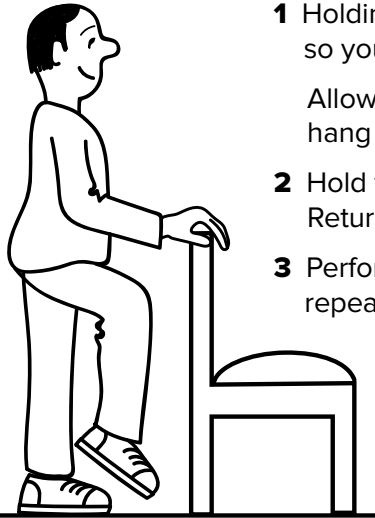
(From *How to Prevent Falls*. See page 10)

Remember to check with your physician or physical therapist before beginning exercises.

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### FOR STARTERS:

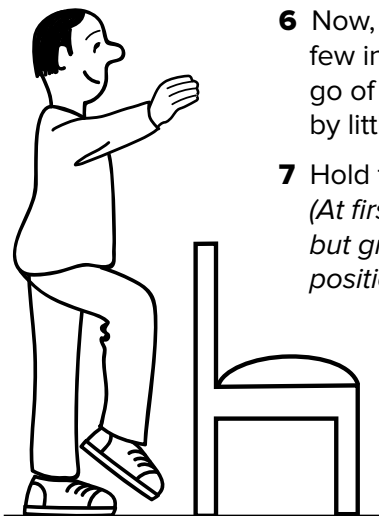
- Stand with feet slightly apart.
- Place both hands on the back of a stationary chair in front of you.



- 1** Holding onto the chair, raise your right knee so your foot is a few inches off the floor.  
Allow your right leg, from knee to foot, to hang loose.
- 2** Hold this position and slowly count to three. Return right leg to starting position and relax.
- 3** Perform the activity with your left leg. Now repeat once with right leg, then with left leg.



- 4** Now **“play the piano”** by rippling your fingertips on the back of the chair.
- 5** While **“playing piano,”** repeat lifting your right knee and then your left knee (steps **1, 2** and **3** above.)



**6** Now, raise your right knee so that your foot is a few inches off the floor. Slowly, and relaxed, let go of the chair and gently raise your arms, little by little, until you find your **balance point**.\*

**7** Hold this position as long as you can. *(At first, it might be just a fraction of a second, but gradually you will be able to hold your position for longer intervals.)*

**8** Return your hands to the chair and lower your right leg.

RELAX.

**9** Repeat with your left leg.

- 
- **Remember to maintain your posture — keep your back straight.**
  - **REPEAT all 9 steps of this exercise: 4 to 5 times.**
- 

\*Your “**Balance Point**” refers to the position in which, when you are balancing, your weight is evenly positioned and you feel comfortable, safe and secure.

# MAKE YOUR HOME SAFER

Ask for a  
**FREE**  
Home  
Safety  
Assessment

Brought to you by the  
Tompkins County Office  
for the Aging

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## Do-It-Yourself Home Safety Assessment Tools

### Home Falls Prevention Checklist

Take a few minutes now or when you get home to walk through your house, room by room, to identify fall hazards. Use the checklist in Appendix A on page 21 to help spot hazards.

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### HSSAT (Home Safety Self-Assessment Tool)



An excellent online tool is available at:  
[www.agingresearch.buffalo.edu](http://www.agingresearch.buffalo.edu)

You can also pick up a free copy of this booklet at the Tompkins County Office for the Aging.

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## Professional Home Safety Assessment

Assessments can be provided by professionals who help you evaluate overall home safety and accessibility and suggest solutions to meet your specific needs.

### Empowerment by Design Occupational Therapy

PO Box 506  
Ithaca, NY 14851

**(607) 351-1654**

[www.ebd-ot.com](http://www.ebd-ot.com)

Home safety evaluations, accessibility products, universal design and remodeling services.

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## Full Spectrum Rehabilitation and Wellness

903 Hanshaw Rd. #201  
Ithaca, NY 14850

**(607) 227-4421**

Specializing in geriatric rehabilitation and falls prevention.

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## Tompkins County Office for the Aging (COFA)

214 W. Martin Luther King Jr./State St.  
Ithaca, NY 14850

**(607) 274-5486**

[www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa](http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa)

Call to schedule a free home safety assessment.

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## Home Modification Resources

**Private Contractor Certified Aging-In-Place Specialists (CAPS)** are professionals who guide consumers in modifying their homes to age in place. They include contractors and occupational therapists who complete courses, pass exams, participate in continuing education and adhere to a code of ethics.

**Below is a list of individuals within 20 miles of Ithaca** who have CAPS certification current as of December 2018. For an updated list, go online to: [www.nahb.com](http://www.nahb.com) and search the

***Directory of Professionals with Home Building Designations***

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Dean Shea	Sunny Brook Builders	(607) 539-6286
Gary Slade	Crown Construction	(607) 844-3993
Charles Freiberger	Northstar Lifts	(315) 864-6006

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You may find names of contractors from acquaintances who have been satisfied with the work done for them. Before you hire, especially if it will involve significant costs, shop around, get references and check them, obtain proof of insurance and get everything in writing.

**Never** pay the full price up front.

The agencies listed in the next two sections may also have lists of contractors who do particular types of home modifications (e.g., installing ramps, chairlifts, accessibility modifications).

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## Accessibility Consultations

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### **Finger Lakes Independence Center (FLIC)**

215 Fifth Street  
Ithaca, NY 14850

**Voice/TTY (607) 272-2433**

**[www.fliconline.org](http://www.fliconline.org)**

**FLIC** offers information & referral for accessible housing, advocacy and other disability issues. Staff can visit your home for consultations, to make suggestions for improving building accessibility and to review architectural plans prior to construction.

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### **Scott Jones, OT**

Jones Accessible Homes, LLC

**(607) 220-7288**

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## Help for Low-Income Households

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### **Tompkins County Office for the Aging (COFA)**

214 W. Martin Luther King Jr./State St.  
Ithaca, NY 14850

**(607) 274-5486**

**[www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa](http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa)**

The Office for the Aging assists income-eligible seniors (60+) in identifying and applying for grant funds for home repairs/modifications and weatherization, including financial assistance through USDA Rural Development, INHS/Better Housing for Tompkins County, the Office for Aging WRAP program, and other sources. Occasionally volunteer help may be arranged through Love Knows No Bounds, community Faith Partners, or other area groups.

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## INHS

115 W. Clinton St.  
Ithaca, NY 14850

**(607) 277-4500**

**[www.ithacanhs.org](http://www.ithacanhs.org)**

INHS offers several programs to income-eligible households. Their home repair programs for seniors or homeowners with disabilities provide small home repairs and modifications, charging only for the materials. They can repair stairs, install handrails, grab bars, comfort-height toilets, install light switches, do other minor electrical projects, and patch loose flooring (tripping hazards). In some instances, repairs can be made to porches or sidewalks (tripping hazards).

Repair grants and deferred loans are available for people who need important, basic repairs but can't afford to make loan payments, provided they meet income guidelines.

The **Access to Home Program\*** provides funding for safety and comfort measures for low-to-moderate income homeowners with disabilities or homeowners living with a family member living with a disability.

**Home accessibility improvements include, but are not limited to:**

- Ramps, lifts, handrails, stair glides, doorway access
- Roll-in showers, grab bars and seats
- Modifications for the visually and hearing impaired
- Placement of bathroom or bedroom on the first floor
- Special thermostatic and environmental controls



*\*The current Access to Home Program grant cycle closed in spring of 2018. Access to Home grants may become available locally again at some point in the future.*



# ASSISTIVE EQUIPMENT

Be sure to have a professional help you choose equipment that fits you as well as show you how to use it.

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## Equipment Loan

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### **Finger Lakes Independence Center (FLIC)**

215 Fifth Street  
Ithaca, NY 14850

Voice/TTY (607) 272-2433

[www.fliconline.org](http://www.fliconline.org)

FLIC maintains a loan closet with various adaptive equipment for short-term loans, including wheelchairs, crutches, portable ramps, tub transfer benches and shower chairs. Clients can try out and borrow adaptive devices for vision, hearing, mobility and other impairments. Modular ramping systems are also available for loan that meet all ADA requirements but are meant only for temporary use while waiting for a permanent solution to improve access.

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### **Trumansburg American Legion**

4431 Seneca Rd.  
Trumansburg, NY 14886

(607) 387-4212

Loan closet with wheelchairs, crutches, canes, walkers and commodes.

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### **Dryden Veterans' Memorial Home**

2272 Dryden Rd. (Rt. 13)  
Dryden, NY 13053

(607) 844-9900

Loan closet items include bathroom safety equipment, canes, crutches, wheelchairs and hospital beds.

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### **Groton American Legion**

307 Main St.  
Groton, NY 13073

(607) 898-3837

Loan closet items include canes, crutches, wheelchairs, hospital beds and bathroom safety equipment.

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## Equipment Rental/Purchase/Repair

The agencies listed below sell assistive equipment related to falls prevention. They may also rent/sell other types of medical equipment and supplies (e.g., respiratory supplies) not mentioned in this listing. Check your insurance to see what might be covered.

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### Empowerment by Design Occupational Therapy

PO Box 506  
Ithaca, NY 14851

**(607) 351-1654**

[www.ebd-ot.com](http://www.ebd-ot.com)

**Rents:** modular ramps

**Sells:** modular ramps, grab bars, transfer systems and lifts. Specializes in custom adaptive equipment

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### Gerould's Healthcare Center

200 South Main St.  
Elmira, NY 14904

**(607) 367-6935**

[www.geroulds.com](http://www.geroulds.com)

**Sells & Rents:** power wheelchairs, lift chairs and scooters

**Sells:** shower chairs and benches, stair lifts

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### Guthrie—Med Supply Depot

402 Third St.  
Ithaca, NY 14850

**(607) 273-4727 or 1-877-815-2627**

[www.guthrie.org](http://www.guthrie.org)

**Rents:** power chairs, wheelchairs, and transport chairs

**Sells:** all of the above plus commodes, canes, crutches, walkers, shower chairs, benches, and grab bars

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**Kinney Drugs (downtown Ithaca location)**

513 N. Cayuga St.  
Ithaca, NY 14850

**(607) 272-8333**

**Sells:** wheelchairs and transport wheelchairs, commodes, canes, crutches, walkers

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**Lincare**

1301 B Trumansburg Rd.  
Ithaca, NY 14850

**(607) 277-4027**

**Rents:** hospital beds, wheelchairs

**Sells:** walkers

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**Maximum Mobility**

129 North Ave.  
Owego, NY 13827

**(607) 687-6205 or 1-888-372-7222**

**Rents:** manual wheelchairs

**Sells:** power and manual wheelchairs, scooters, stair glides, ramps, power seat lift chairs

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**Professional Home Care**

Ithaca Shopping Plaza, 322 Elmira Rd, Ste. 4,  
Ithaca, NY 14850

**(607) 257-1425**

**Rents:** wheelchairs and hospital beds

**Sells:** lift chairs, transfer benches, grab bars, raised toilet seats

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**Wonderful Wheelchairs**

1229 Trumansburg Rd.  
Ithaca, NY 14850

Call: Greg Harrington **(607) 242-1780**

Refurbishes used wheelchairs and makes them available to people in the Ithaca area who need them.

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## Locating Other Assistive Devices/Products

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### AbleData

[www.abledata.com](http://www.abledata.com)

AbleData is a helpful government-funded, online directory providing objective information about assistive technology products and rehabilitation equipment. Visit the website and search for products by *Product Name* or *Keywords*.

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### Personal Emergency Response System

Tompkins County Office for the Aging (COFA)

214 W. Martin Luther King Jr./State St.

Ithaca, NY 14850

**(607) 274-5482**

[www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa](http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/cofa)

The Personal Emergency Response System (**PERS**) is a communication alert which links an individual with the Doyle Medical Monitoring Call Center in Rochester, NY. The button is on the unit or on a pendant worn around the neck (or on a bracelet). When pressed, it automatically dials an emergency rescue dispatcher. **PERS units rent for \$25/month.** Optional features are available at an additional charge:

- Fall detection sensor
- GPS mobile service



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## Check for Safety: A Home Fall Prevention Checklist for Older Adults

The following checklist and recommendations were produced by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention):

[www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/adultfalls.html](http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/adultfalls.html)

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### Falls at Home

Falls are often due to hazards that are overlooked but easy to fix. This checklist will help you find and fix those hazards in your home. The checklist asks about hazards found in each room of your home and tells you how to fix the problems. At the end of the checklist, you'll find other tips for preventing falls.

#### FLOORS:

##### Look at the floor in each room

- Ask someone to move the furniture so your path is clear.
- Remove the rugs or use double-sided tape or a non-slip backing so the rugs won't slip.
- Pick up items that are on the floor.
- Coil or tape cords and wires next to the wall so you can't trip over them. If needed, have an electrician put in another outlet.

#### STAIRS AND STEPS:

##### Look at the stairs you use both inside and outside your home

- Make sure the carpet is firmly attached to every step, or remove the carpet and attach non-slip rubber treads to the stairs.
- Pick up items on the stairs. Always keep objects off the stairs.
- Fix loose or uneven steps.
- Fix loose handrails or put in new ones. Make sure handrails are on both sides of the stairs and are as long as the stairs.
- Have an electrician put in an overhead light at the top and bottom of the stairs.

- Have a friend or family member change any burned-out bulbs.
- Have an electrician put in a light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs if this has not been done. You can purchase light switches that glow.

## **KITCHEN:**

### **Look at your kitchen eating area**

- Move items in your cabinets. Keep things you use often on the lower shelves (about waist level).
- If you must use a step stool, get one with a bar to hold on to. Never use a chair as a step stool.

## **BATHROOMS:**

### **Look at your bathrooms**

- Put a non-slip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub or shower.
- Have a carpenter put grab bars inside the tub and next to the toilet.



## **BEDROOMS:**

### **Look at your bedrooms**

- Place a lamp close to the bed where it's easy to reach.
- Put in a night-light so you can see where you're walking. Some night-lights go on by themselves after dark.

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## Other Things You Can Do to Prevent Falls

- **Do physical activity regularly.** This makes you stronger and improves your balance and coordination.
- **Have your doctor or pharmacist look at all your medications,** even over-the-counter medicines. Some medicines can make you sleepy or dizzy.
- **Have your vision checked at least once a year** by an eye doctor. Poor vision can increase your risk of falling.
- **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.** Put in brighter light bulbs. Fluorescent bulbs are bright and cost less to use. It's safest to have uniform lighting in a room. Add lighting to dark areas. Hang lightweight curtains or shades to reduce glare.
- **Paint a contrasting color on the top edge of all steps** so that you can see the stairs better. For example, use a light color paint on dark wood.

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## Other Safety Tips

- 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 and can't get up.
- Look out for pets who may get underfoot or are resting on floors or stairs.





## APPENDIX B

### Medical Screening and Assessment

The material on the following two pages comes from the 2010 American Geriatric Society Clinical Practice guidelines found at:

<https://www.aafp.org/afp/2010/0701/p81.html>

The American Geriatrics Society has issued the following recommendations for screening and assessment by doctors and physical therapists for prevention of falls in older persons:

1. Each person should be asked whether he/she has fallen (in the past year) and, if so, about the frequency and circumstances of the fall(s). They should also be asked if they experience any difficulties with walking or balance.
2. Anyone who has had a fall should be evaluated for gait and balance.
3. Anyone who has problems on standard gait and balance tests should be given a comprehensive assessment.



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## Comprehensive Fall Risk Assessment

If you are curious about what a comprehensive assessment should include, the following are recommendations the American Geriatrics Society makes to physicians (and physical therapists). Some of the terminology is unfamiliar to most of us, but this information will give you an idea of what might be covered.

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### Focused History

- History of falls: circumstances of the fall(s), frequency, symptoms at time of fall, injuries, other consequences
- Medication review: All prescribed and over-the-counter medications with dosages
- History of relevant risk factors: acute or chronic medical problems (e.g., osteoporosis, urinary incontinence, cardiovascular disease)

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### Physical Examination

- Detailed assessment of gait, balance, and mobility levels and lower extremity joint function
- Neurological function: cognitive evaluation, lower extremity peripheral nerves, proprioception, reflexes
- Muscle strength (lower extremities)
- Cardiovascular status: heart rate and rhythm, postural pulse, blood pressure
- Assessment of visual acuity
- Examination of the feet and footwear

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## Functional Assessment

- Assessment of activities of daily living (**ADL**) skills including use of adaptive equipment as appropriate
- Assessment of the individual's perceived functional ability and fear related to falling (i.e., is individual curtailing involvement in activities he/she is safely able to perform due to fear of falling?)

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## Environmental Assessment

- This assessment includes home safety.



