



Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span

Volume 16, Issue 1

The Healthy Journey

handls.nih.gov
877-677-9538

U.S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH • NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING

Preventing falls

Falls are a leading cause of injury in older adults and can be severe. Falls may cause less mobility, loss of independence, or death. Every year, 1 out of 4 older adults report falling. About 1 out of 10 falls result in limited mobility or require medical attention.

Falls are the most common cause of hospitalizations and deaths related to hip fractures and brain injuries in older adults. When you fall, it is important to get medical attention. This is especially true if you lose consciousness or are on blood thinners.

The risk of falling increases as you get older. Other things also increase the risk of falling such as lower body weakness, foot pain or numbness, and difficulties with walking or balance. If you need to use a mobility device such as a cane or walker, then be sure that you are taught how to use it properly.

Other risk factors for falling include the use of certain medicines or combinations of medicines. Some medicines can make you drowsy or dizzy. Some medications may increase your needs to use the bathroom. It is very important to have your doctor review the medicines you are taking.

Additional factors that increase falls include poor vision, improper footwear, and physical dangers in the home, such as objects on the floor that can be tripped over. The more risk factors a person has, the increased chance they have of falling.

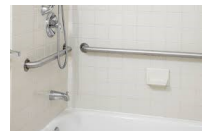
Here are some steps you can take to prevent falls:

- Use your assistive devices appropriately. Do NOT use assistive devices to go up or down stairs. Do NOT use them to stand up since assistive devices are unstable.
- Hold onto the handrails when going up and down stairs.
- Wear sturdy non-slip shoes and make sure shoelaces are always tied. Slippers,



shoes with heels, and shoes with slick soles can increase your risk of falling.

- Stand up slowly to prevent dizziness. Standing up quickly can drop your blood pressure, which may cause you to become dizzy. If you become dizzy, sit back down until the dizziness goes away.
- Clean up spills immediately to prevent slips and falls.
- Remove area rugs from your home. If you must have area rugs then use double sided tape to prevent them from moving.
- Use nonslip mats in the tub and shower.
- Have your eyes checked once a year, and update your eyeglasses prescription if necessary.
- Use bright lights in your home. Older adults have increased rates of visual problems, such as glaucoma and cataracts, that can limit vision and cause falls.
- Install grab bars in the bathroom to assist with getting in and out of the bathtub, or on and off the toilet.
- Remove things that can be tripped over in the home. Remove clothes or shoes in the walkway or cords along the floor. Always keep objects off the floor and move furniture if necessary to provide a clear walkway.
- If you have pets, always be aware where they are so that you do not trip over them. Clean your pet's feeding area frequently to prevent slips. If you have an indoor cat, sweep up litter on the floor.



Contents

Preventing falls	1
It's Flu Season!	2
Contacting HANDLS	3

- Increase your movement to improve balance and strength. Fear of falls can cause a person to become less active, which in turn increases weakness and risk for falling.
- Have your doctor review your medications that may increase your risk of falling.
- Ask your doctor about taking supplements to improve bone, muscle, and nerve health.

Exercise reduces fall risk

The best thing you can do to prevent falls, is to get moving and exercise. Exercising improves your strength and balance, which helps to prevent falls. Here are two exercises you can do to improve your lower body strength and reduce your risk of falling.



Sit-to-Stand. Sit on a well-built chair with your feet flat on the floor shoulder-width apart. Slowly stand up using your hands as little as possible. Slowly sit back down. Avoid collapsing into the chair. If you are unable to complete this exercise without using your hands entirely, lightly rest your hands on the sides of the chair for help. With practice, you may slowly progress to using no hands. Repeat this exercise 10-15 times. If unable to complete this many when starting this exercise, slowly increase the number until this goal is met. This exercise improves your lower body strength.

Single Leg Stand. Stand in front of a well-built object, such as a handrail or chair. Hold on to this object and lift one leg. Slowly let go of your grip and try to stand on one leg for 10 seconds. If you begin to feel unsafe, grab onto the well-built object in front of you and lower your leg down to the floor. Switch legs to repeat. Slowly increase the amount of time on one leg until you can perform this exercise



for 30 seconds. If you attempt this exercise and immediately feel unsafe when releasing your grip, hold onto your sturdy object while completing the exercise. This exercise will help to improve lower body strength and balance.

Talk to your doctor about which exercises are best for you. Your doctor may refer you to physical therapy to help to improve your mobility.

What should you do after a fall?

Many falls don't cause injuries and are not reported. However 37% of falls require some type of medical attention. Falls can prevent an older adult from doing everyday activities on their own. It is important to seek medical attention if you have severe pain or limited mobility after falling. Also seek medical attention if you hit your head. This is especially important if you are on blood thinners or lose consciousness.

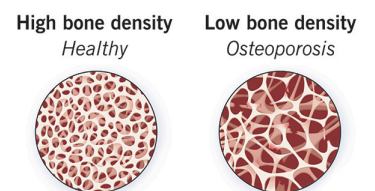
Some people are nervous about doing physical activity. This is particularly true after you have a fall. Do not allow the fear of falling again to limit your physical activity. If you stop exercising then you may be more likely to have a fall. Without exercise you will become weaker and possibly fall again.

Speak with your doctor about different exercises to improve strength and balance. Or, your doctor may prescribe physical therapy. If a fall results in serious injury, speak with your doctor about bone density testing. Osteoporosis can increase your risk of serious injury.

Osteoporosis

What is osteoporosis (pronounced as: ost + ee + oh + puh + roh + sis)? Osteoporosis is a disease that causes bones to become weak and more likely to break. It is a "silent disease" because there are no visible signs until a bone is broken. Nearly 1 in 5 women and 1 in

Osteoporosis



Healthy spine



Spine with osteoporosis



20 men over the age of 50 have osteoporosis.

DEXA scans are a way to check your risk for bone fractures. DEXA scans measure bone density, which generally declines as we age. Women between the ages 50-64 should get a bone density scan. Women go through menopause which increases their risk for osteoporosis. Men should also have a scan done between the ages 50-69. Their risk for osteoporosis increases after the age of 70.

Follow up with your doctor if you have an abnormal DEXA scan result. Starting treatment can lower your risk of a serious injury if you fall. Healthy ways to help prevent osteoporosis include eating a healthy diet, getting active, limiting alcohol and cigarette use, spending time in the sun to increase vitamin D levels, and maintaining a healthy weight.

It's Flu Season!

Remember to get your Flu and COVID-19 Vaccinations (Boosters)

Millions of people get the flu each year. The flu is an illness caused by a virus called influenza. It spreads easily. Signs of flu are coughing, sore throat, runny nose, fever, body aches, and tiredness. You can prevent the flu by:

- Getting a flu shot
- Washing your hands often
- Staying away from people who are sick

Vaccines (shots) teach our immune system how to recognize and fight a specific virus. The protection some shots provide can fade over time. You may need additional shots (boosters) to maintain protection. A new flu shot is required every year. Doctors recommend getting your flu shot around October or November before the winter flu season. The influenza shot prevents millions of illnesses and flu-related doctor's visits each year.

The 2024-2025 COVID-19 shots are especially recommended for those who:

- Are ages 65 and older
- Are at higher risk for severe COVID-19

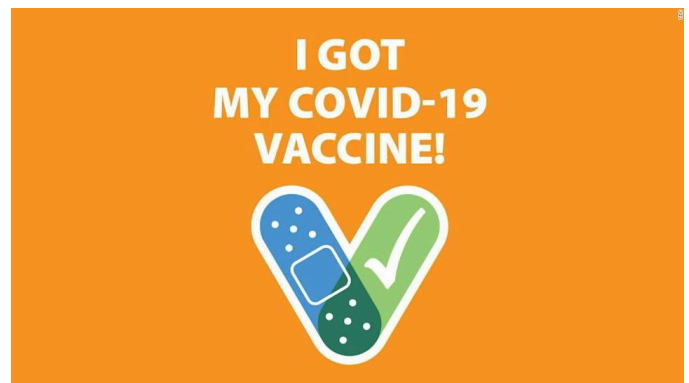


- Have never gotten a COVID-19 shot

The Influenza (Flu) shot is recommended for:

- Anyone who is over 6 months old, every flu season, unless they have a prior allergy.
- Vaccination is very important for people who are at higher risk of serious problems from flu. Older adults and those with pre-existing chronic conditions are at higher risk.

Most pharmacies and grocery stores offer flu and COVID-19 shots. Your healthcare provider can also give these in their office. You can visit <https://www.vaccines.gov/> to locate a place to get a shot. If you don't have health insurance, you can call 311 to review your flu shot options in Baltimore City.



You can receive free At-Home COVID-19 tests at:

<https://special.usps.com/testkits>

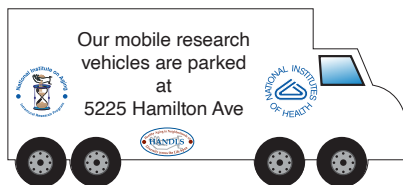
Each order includes 4 individual rapid antigen COVID-19 tests per household and will ship free.



Contacting HANDLS

If you'd like to be added to the HANDLS email list, please message us at handls@mail.nih.gov.

HANDLS
National Institute on Aging
Biomedical Research Center
251 Bayview Blvd
Baltimore MD 21224-2816



U.S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH • NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING

Newsletter for the HANDLS community

The purpose of this study is to learn about changes in health over time. Using our medical research vehicles, we want to study as many people with different backgrounds as we can. We want this study to help us understand healthy aging by examining the influences of different backgrounds on changes in health over time. The information we gather will help improve health and prevent disabilities. Our goal is to gather information to improve health and prevent disabilities for people of all backgrounds, particularly in minority communities and communities with limited resources.

For information about our study call 877-677-9538 or visit our website <https://handls.nih.gov>.