



Tips on healthy ageing

AVOIDING FALLS

There are many ways to improve balance, reduce falls risk and maintain independence.

1. Medications

Some medications, including sleeping tablets are associated with an increased risk of falling. Also, taking four or more medications can increase your falls risk. If you are concerned that your medications may be increasing your falls risk:

- Discuss medications with your doctor
- Take medications as prescribed
- Avoid sleeping tablets
- See your pharmacist if you have trouble managing your medications.
- Refer to tips on 'Safe use of medicines' (hyperlink to NARI page)

2. Health Conditions

Health conditions including vision, arthritis, dizziness, blood pressure, stroke, and incontinence affect people's balance.

- Falls prevention health professionals work in community health centres (may require doctor's referral), as well as in private settings.
- Have your eyes tested every two years. Use separate glasses for reading and distance if you have trouble judging distances with bifocals. Removal of cataracts can reduce people's risk of hip fracture.
- If you get dizzy when standing, sit down until the dizziness passes, then stand up again slowly. Discuss this with your doctor.

3. Physical Activity

Health professionals can give individual advice on exercises for balance, strength and fitness.

- Balance exercises can be done at home with just the kitchen bench to hold onto, and in community centres or gyms.
- Tai Chi can improve balance.
- Contact your community health centre, ask your doctor or visit the Australian Physiotherapy Association Website: www.physiotherapy.asn.au
- Ask your local gym if they run Living Longer Living Stronger programs for over 50s, or contact the Council on the Ageing www.cotavic.org.au/healthy_and_active_ageing/living_longer



4. Feet and Footwear

Painful or swollen feet make walking difficult and some footwear can cause slips, trips or stumbles.

- See a podiatrist or doctor if your feet are painful, swollen or have pins and needles
- Wear comfortable, firm-fitting, flat shoes with a low broad heel and soles that grip.
- Do not wear poorly fitting slippers or walk in socks.
- If you have difficulty finding shoes, ask your podiatrist about specialist shoe stores.

5. Walking aids

Numerous aids are available to assist people with walking, including walking sticks and frames. Advice can be obtained from qualified staff (physiotherapist, occupational therapist, equipment provider) on the right type, height and use of aid.

- Keep aids well maintained, especially brakes and rubber stoppers.

6. Environmental factors

- Flooring - should be dry and non-slip. Remove or stick down rugs and loose carpet
- Lighting - ensure adequate lighting, and reduce sun-glare by using a curtain or blinds. Use a light if getting up at night. Our balance is reduced in the dark.
- Stairs - need to be well maintained and lit, preferably with light switches at the top and bottom. Marking the edge of steps with a contrasting coloured strip increases safety.
- Chairs - avoid chairs with wheels. Feet should reach the floor when sitting.
- Bathroom - dry the floor and use rubber mats in shower/ bath. If standing is difficult, see an occupational therapist for advice on installation of rails and bathroom seating.
- Bedroom - make sure you can get on and off your bed easily. Arrange shelves and wardrobes so you don't have to lean or reach too far for frequently used items (including spectacles, walking aids). Remove clutter, clothes from the floor and electrical cords to reduce tripping hazards.
- Kitchen - Frequently used objects should be easily reached. See an occupational therapist or the independent living centre www.ilcaustralia.org.au for advice on kitchen equipment, if you have trouble with your hands or vision.

7. Outdoors:

- take care with slippery surfaces and around animals
- be aware of broken paving stones, curbs and changing levels.
- ensure stairs and pathways are well lit, obstacle free and well-maintained
- consider installing rails for balance and support (see occupational therapist)