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## FALLS AND OLDER ADULTS: THE FACTS

### How serious is the problem of falls?

Falls are a serious health risk for older adults in Minnesota and nationwide. Minnesota's death rate from falls for adults 65 and older is among the highest in the nation, according to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control. Nationwide, more than one out of three adults over the age of 65 fall each year. For people in this age group, falls are the leading cause of injury death. Non-fatal falls also have serious results: 20% to 30% result in moderate to severe injuries that reduce mobility and independence, and increase the risk of premature death.

### What are the common risk factors for falling?

- Lower body weakness
- Problems with walking and balance
- Taking four or more medications or any psychoactive medications (medicines that have a significant effect on mood or mental state)

Other important risk factors are Parkinson's Disease, history of stroke, arthritis, impaired cognitive processes (memory, perception, reasoning, judgment), and problems with vision.

### How can we reduce the risk of falling?

#### 1. Exercise regularly to increase lower body strength and balance

Exercise will build strength and increase a sense of well-being. It's one of the best ways to reduce the risk of falling. Exercises that improve balance and coordination are most helpful.

#### 2. Review medications with a doctor or pharmacist

A regular review of all medicines (both prescription and over-the-counter) with a person's regular doctor or pharmacist can help reduce side effects and interactions. It may be possible to reduce the number of medications used, and those that could make a person drowsy or light-headed.

#### 3. Keep on top of chronic health conditions and vision

Older adults should see a health care provider regularly for chronic conditions and have an eye doctor check their vision at least once a year.

#### 4. Make the home safer

- Most fall injuries happen when people fall from a standing height for example when they trip while walking on the same level (not from falling down stairs). Certain risk factors in the home environment may contribute to about half of all home falls. To make living areas safer:
  - Remove tripping hazards such as throw rugs and clutter in walkways
  - Use non slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors; install grab bars next to the toilet and in the tub or shower



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- Install handrails on both sides of stairways
- Improve lighting throughout the home.

Also, older adults should wear shoes that give good support and have non-slip soles. They should avoid wearing slippers and athletic shoes with deep treads.

### **Where can I find more information?**

Minnesota Safety Council (interactive fall prevention checklist) at

<http://www.minnesotasafetycouncil.org/seniorsafe/falls/>

Centers for Disease Control at <http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/index.h>

<http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/index.html>

Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (info on home accessibility remodeling design and funding) at <http://www.mnhousing.gov>

Minnesota Falls Prevention Initiative, <http://www.mnfallsprevention.org>

#### **Acknowledgments:**

[National Center for Injury Prevention and Control](#)

[Centers for Disease Control](#)

[National Safety Council](#)



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