

# Partners in Quality Care



## Objectives:

- \*Review of fall risk factors
- \*Review of environmental factors for falls preventions and ways to assist clients

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## References:

<https://www.standingstrongnc.org/blog/whatisafall>

<https://www.cdc.gov/falls/data-research/facts-stats/index.html>

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/64c7f39261414e37b0c3d914/t/663556f999062b76e506336a/1714771705909/pet+safety+tips+to+reduce+risk+of+falls+s+284%29.pdf>

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/falls-and-falls-prevention/older-adults-and-balance-problems>

## Fall Risk Reduction

A fall is defined as "an event which results in a person coming to rest inadvertently on the ground, floor, or other level" (World Health Organization). It is when a person loses their balance and lands unintentionally or without meaning to. Falls can happen in many different ways and for many different reasons. Some conditions that could make a person more likely to fall include environmental hazards, medical conditions, and even certain medications. Each year, millions of older people (those 65 and older) fall. In fact, more than one out of four older people falls each year, but less than half tell their doctor. Falling once doubles a person's chances of falling again. Every fall does not result in an injury. Falls can be serious at any age, but for adults 55 and older, they can be very dangerous. More than ninety-five percent of hip fractures are caused by falling. Falls are not inevitable as a person ages and are not a normal part of aging, it is harder to recover and rebound as a person ages. Examples of common reasons for falls include dehydration, side effects from medications, changes in a person's feet sensitivity, pain, and hazards in the home. When a person knows what increases their risk for falls, they can develop a plan to stay safe. As an In-home aide, you can help your clients with their plan to stay safe and reduce their risk of falls. Some of the most common falls are at home where a person may have a false sense of security. A history of falls is a risk factor for falling as well as females, over 80 years old and living alone. Most falls are caused by a combination of risk factors. The more risk factors a person has, the greater their chances of falling. Many of the client's receiving home care will fit into these categories, be alert for falls risks with your clients. Many people who fall, even if they are not injured, become afraid of falling. This fear may cause a person to cut down on their everyday activities. When a person is less active, they become weaker, and this increases their chances of falling. Fall prevention activities will not guarantee a person will not fall, but being aware of falls risk factors, ways to reduce risks, as well as potential falls hazards are ways you can assist a person in reducing the chances of falling.

## **STATS ON FALLS:**

- One out of 10 falls results in an injury that causes the older adult to restrict their activities for a day or more or to seek attention from the healthcare system.
- Each year, there are about 3 million emergency department visits due to older people falls.
- Each year, there are about 1 million fall-related hospitalizations among older adults.
- In 2019, 83% percent of hip fracture deaths and 88% of emergency department visits and hospitalizations for hip fractures were caused by falls.
- Each year, nearly 319,000 older people are hospitalized for hip fractures.
- *Falls are the most common cause of traumatic brain injuries (TBI).*

### **Fall Risk Reduction**

Each of the examples below is considered a fall because each of these situations involves an unintentional loss of balance, resulting in the person coming to rest on a lower surface, which fits the definition of a fall. Falls can happen in many ways and understanding these examples helps in recognizing potential risks. By being aware of these situations, you can take steps to prevent falls and improve safety.

- ✓ Losing balance and landing on the ground while going up a curb
- ✓ Getting feet tangled and landing on a bed
- ✓ Getting dizzy and landing on the couch
- ✓ Losing balance and landing on the shower floor

Other examples of falls include:

- ✓ Tripping over a rug and landing on the floor: This common household hazard can cause a fall, especially if rugs are not securely fastened or have curled edges.
- ✓ Slipping on a wet bathroom floor and hitting the ground: *Bathrooms can be particularly dangerous due to the combination of water and hard surfaces.* Be extremely cautious helping a client in the bathroom.
- ✓ Falling off a step stool while reaching for something high: Improperly using step stools or ladders can lead to falls from heights.
- ✓ Losing balance while walking a pet and falling onto the sidewalk: Pets can sometimes cause unexpected movements that lead to falls.
- ✓ Stumbling on uneven pavement and ending up on the ground: Outdoor environments with uneven surfaces pose a significant risk for falls. Be aware of the client's outdoor environment.
- ✓ Other ways a person may fall include on slippery floors, rickety stairs or tripping over electric cords, helping to keep a person's environment less risky for falls is an important role for an In-home aide.

Ways to reduce falls risk include the following, and as an In-home aide, you can help your client to reduce their falls risk while assisting with care activities.

- If a person has low blood pressure, it's smart for them to sit on the edge of the bed and let their feet touch the floor for a moment before standing up. This can help them to avoid feeling dizzy. If you are assisting a client with getting out of bed, go slow, and have them wait before they stand to ensure they are not dizzy.
- Modifying Surroundings- most falls happen at home. A person can make sure their home is as safe as possible by removing tripping hazards, securing rugs, and installing grab bars where needed. A safer home can help a person avoid falls. A room by room safety check that can be used is at the following link- <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/falls-and-falls-prevention/preventing-falls-home-room-room> . You can discuss trip hazards with your clients and assist with removing rugs, or other potential trip hazards.
- A person needs to be aware of their surroundings at home inside or outside, and how their body moves, and take their time. When you are assisting a client with mobility including walking, be aware of the surroundings and any trip hazards inside and outside the home, do not rush, and assist the client according to their plan of care. If the client uses any assistive devices such as a walker, or cane, make sure the client has access to the device and report according to the plan of care issues with devices such as improperly working, or broken.
- For a person with a pet (s), pet safety awareness is another way to help with falls risk reduction. Environmental pet safety tips that you can share with your clients and assist includes:
  - Clean up spills around pet bowls promptly to avoid slips
  - Keep areas where a pet is likely to sleep, play, or eat well lit
  - Use nightlights to improve visibility in dark areas to help you see your pets
  - Pick up pet toys in high traffic areas
  - Awareness of where the pet is to avoid tripping is important, a bell on the pet collar may help

### **Fall Risk Reduction**

Balance problems are one reason older people fall. People are more likely to have problems with balance as they grow older. In some cases, a person can help reduce their risk for certain balance problems, but problems often can start suddenly and without obvious cause. Balance problems can be caused by certain medications or medical conditions. The list below covers some common causes of balance problems.

- ✓ Medications. A person should check with their doctor or other healthcare provider if they notice balance problems while taking certain medications. Ask if other medications can be used instead, if the dosage can be safely reduced, or if there are other ways to reduce unwanted side effects.
  - ✓ Inner ear problems. A part of the inner ear called the labyrinth is responsible for balance. When the labyrinth becomes inflamed, a condition called labyrinthitis occurs, causing vertigo (a sensation of whirling and loss of balance) and imbalance. Certain ear diseases and infections can lead to labyrinthitis.
  - ✓ Alcohol. Alcohol in the blood can also cause dizziness and balance problems by affecting how the inner ear works.
  - ✓ Other medical conditions. Certain conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, or problems with your vision, thyroid, nerves, or blood vessels can cause dizziness and other balance problems.
- A person may have a balance problem if they experience the following issues:
- ❖ Feel unsteady
  - ❖ Feel dizzy or as if the room is spinning around them, even if only for brief periods of time
  - ❖ Feel as if they are moving when they are standing or sitting still
  - ❖ Lose their balance and fall
  - ❖ Feel as if they are falling
  - ❖ Vision becomes blurred

**Chronic conditions:** more than 90% of older adults have at least one chronic condition like diabetes, heart disease, or arthritis. Often, these increase the risk of falling because they result in lost function, inactivity, depression, pain, or use of multiple medications. Many of your clients will have a chronic condition making them at risk for falls.

**Arthritis-** falls risk factors include joint pain, stiff joints, limited lower body mobility, and fatigue.

Encourage your client in any assigned strengthening exercises and assist client with exercises per the plan of care.

**Diabetes-** falls risk factors include low vision clarity, loss of sensation in the feet, imbalance, low blood sugar. Encourage clients to have eye exams and to control their blood sugar with prescribed diets and medications.

**Heart Disease** – falls risk factors include low body weight & muscle strength, dizziness or fainting from low blood pressure, low vision & hard of hearing. Encourage your clients to take medications as prescribed and to reduce clutter in the home.

Observe clients for changes in mobility and functioning and record and report per the plan of care instructions (e.g., if the person you are caring for is holding onto walls, furniture, or someone else when walking, or if they have difficulty arising from a chair or getting off the toilet), or if they report feeling like they have balance problems as noted in the list above. Observe clients' environments for home safety concerns related to increased risk for falls, and record and report per the plan of care instructions. A client may benefit from a community resource that can help with home adaptive equipment or from a medical alert system with fall detection. Your agency can provide resource lists for the client. Record and report if a client fall occurs while you are in the client's home. Do not assume a client is not injured, immediately notify your supervisor and call emergency services if needed after a client fall. Even if a person does not seem injured after a fall, they may have an unseen injury such as a head injury or hip fracture or other injury. Find out what your agency policies are regarding reporting incidents such as a fall that you witness or a fall that the client reports to you.