



The abc's of Health
Simple
Advice to
Prevent Falls



Changi
General Hospital
SingHealth

Simple Advice To Prevent Falls

Each year more than a third of the population over the age of 65 experience a fall. Of these, many will be hospitalised.

A fall can result in serious injuries such as broken bones or head trauma. This may lead to permanent disability, or in some cases, death. Even if no injury is sustained, a fall can cause a loss of confidence, reduced mobility, restriction of social activities and ultimately depression and loss of independence.



Falls may be a warning of declining health. However, some falls can be prevented. Risk factors for falls include personal and environmental factors which can be corrected by appropriate interventions. This booklet provides some tips on what you can do to reduce your risk of falling.

What Causes Falls ?

Physical factors :

- Poor vision
- Poor balance
- Slow reaction time
- Muscle weakness
- Joint problems
- Dizziness
- Poor exercise tolerance
- Pain
- Poor memory

Medications :

- Some medications may cause drowsiness and dizziness

Lifestyle factors :

- Alcohol consumption
- Lack of regular exercise
- Nutrition / poor diet

Medical conditions :

Some medical conditions increase your risks of falls e.g. diabetes, Parkinson disease, stroke, dementia, arthritis, urinary frequency and incontinence. People with those conditions may benefit from a falls risk assessment.

Environmental factors :

Environmental hazards, both indoors and outdoors can put you at risk of falls. Places that are poorly lit, with many obstacles, or slippery floors may cause you to fall.

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a condition that causes weak bones which break easily with minimal trauma, ie a fall from a standing or seated position. For more information about osteoporosis, please ask your doctor.

What Can You Do To Reduce Your Risk Of Falls ?

Eyes

Good eyesight is important. Poor vision can increase your chance of falling. Attend regular eye checks. If you have cataracts which are suitable for surgery, having the operation is likely to improve your vision.

Exercise and Mobility

Exercise is one of the most important ways to reduce your risk of falling. Targeted exercise can make you stronger, maintain your muscle strength, joint mobility and balance. Simple walking for 20 minutes, 3 times a week is beneficial. Speak to your doctor before embarking on an exercise programme.

Medication

Some medicines can cause drowsiness or dizziness and cause you to fall. Ask your doctor to review your medications.

Lifestyle

The lifestyle you adopt can make a difference to your risk of falls. Besides exercising regularly, reducing your alcohol intake, not smoking and ensuring you have a balanced diet will help to reduce your risk of falls and osteoporosis. In addition, a healthy lifestyle will make you feel better!

Walking Aid

Some people will benefit from the use of a walking aid. Talk to your doctor or physiotherapist who will recommend the appropriate aid for you.



Footwear

Wearing flat shoes with rubber or non-skid soles can protect you from falls.

What makes a shoe safe?

A thin, firm mid sole so you can "feel" the ground underneath

A firm heel counter to provide support and stability

Laces, buckles or elastic ensure the shoe "holds" onto your foot when walking



A broad low heel to maximise contact with the ground

Adequate size toe box provides foot support

Non-slip, textured sole to prevent slipping

What makes a shoe unsafe?

- Slippers and thongs do not have laces/buckles to hold firmly onto your foot
- Shoes with slippery or worn soles are a balance hazard, especially in wet weather
- Shoes with high or narrow heels make you unstable when walking and can cause ankle sprains
- Shoes without heel counter/ support such as slippers or mules, do not provide support and your feet can slide out of the shoes



Examples of unsafe footwear

Home Fall Prevention Tips

Electrical wires :

- Arrange electrical wires or telephone cords along the walls.

Lighting :

- Ensure hallways, rooms or other frequently used areas are well lit.

Home Fall Prevention Tips


Kitchen



- Place utensils and commonly used items within easy reach at chest or waist level.

- Turn in long handled utensils when cooking.

- Wear a short sleeved top when cooking as long sleeves tend to catch on to pot handles.
- Reduce glare by using shades or indirect lighting.
- Install additional lighting if needed.



Have good, non-glaring lighting over the counter top and stove, especially when food is being sliced or cut.

Clean up spills immediately.

Do not stand on stools and chairs to reach the high shelves.

Home Fall Prevention Tips

Toilet



Fold-away grab bar.

Install a horizontal grab bar at standing wrist height next to toilet or shower chair.

Install a sitting toilet or use a commode chair. Avoid squatting toilets.

Keep the floor dry where possible.

Bathroom

- Install a light switch near the entrance of the bathroom and consider pasting a glow tape/sticker which can glow in the dark.
- Install a night light in the bathroom.
- A sliding or bi-folding door will create more space.

Lay non slip mats on the toilet or bathroom floor as wet soapy tiles are very slippery.



Home Fall Prevention Tips

Bedroom



Install a night light.

Ensure lamp switches are within reach from the bed.

Consider placing a commode or urinal next to the bed at night to avoid the need to walk when sleepy.

- Place walking aids close to the bed.
- Do not smoke in bed.

A cordless door bell may be used for the elderly to get help.



Ensure the bed is of the correct height. You should be able to place your feet flat on the floor when you sit at the edge of the bed.



Home Fall Prevention Tips

Rugs/ Mats



Stairs

- If possible, avoid stairs by sleeping in a room downstairs.
- Ensure stairs are well lit even if you are very familiar with the stairs.

Install light switches at the top and bottom of the stairs.

If carpeting the stairs, avoid deep pile, patterned or dark coloured carpets that make the edge of the step difficult to see.

- Avoid wearing only socks or slippers when using stairs as these tend to be slippery.
- Ensure that nothing is stored on the stairs, especially children's toys.

What To Do If You Fall ?

Do not panic if you fall. Call for help if you are in severe pain or unable to move any part of your body. Do not try to stand and walk immediately. These pictures illustrate the safe way to get up into a sitting position after a fall.



1. First, remain where you fell, and move your limbs slowly to ascertain if any injuries were sustained. Do not try to get up yourself if you are in severe pain or unable to move your limbs. Call someone to help you instead.



2. Slowly bend one knee up and push to roll over onto your uninjured side.



3. Come into a side-sitting position using your arms for support.



4. Slowly, get into the crawling position on all fours. Crawl towards the nearest bed or chair.



5. Place both hands onto the chair or bed and prop yourself into a kneeling position.



6. Use your arms and legs to push yourself into a half-stand.



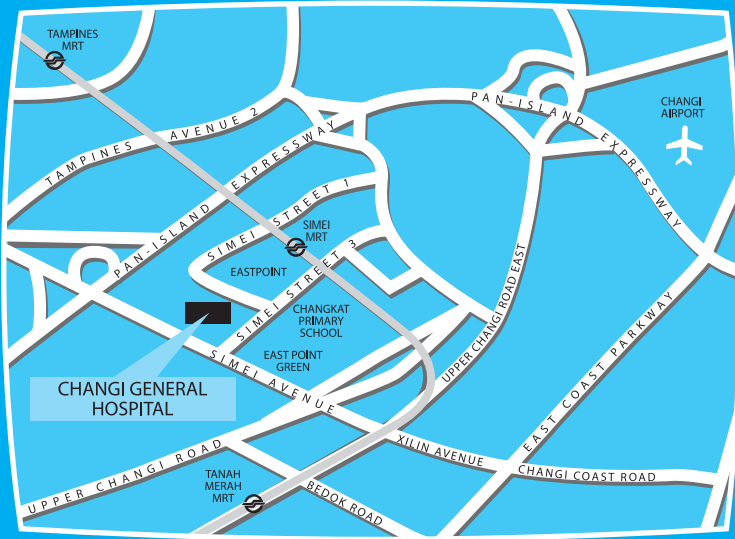
7. Turn your body slowly and sit on the bed or chair to rest. Do not stand and walk straightaway.

Where Else Can You Go For Help ?

If you need professional help, you can make an appointment with Changi General Hospital's Falls Assessment Clinic. You will be seen by a dedicated team of healthcare professionals including a doctor, a nurse and a physiotherapist. They will be able to advise you on your falls risk and the precautions to take.

To make an appointment, please call Tel : 6850 3333.





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