



# MaineHealth

“It all started when she tripped and fell.” How often is this a story that begins with a fall and a broken hip, and ends unbelievably in a nursing home?

It is a story so common that we have come to believe falling is part of getting older. But you don't have to live with the fear of falling. Now is a perfect time to learn about the [things you can do starting today to prevent falls](#) now and in the future.

## Get stronger

The strength of the legs, stomach and back keep you steady. When you are strong, you can catch yourself before you fall down. These muscles get weaker when they are not used; that's why [exercise matters so much](#). Exercise keeps your stabilizing muscles strong so they will go to work for you when you need them.

If it's been a while since you've exercised, you might feel overwhelmed and be unsure about where to begin. It's okay to start small! Even a little bit of exercise makes a big difference. Some ideas:

- Do a little more walking each day.
- Try tai chi. Tai chi is perfect for those who are not yet confident about walking or not able to walk, and a great addition to any exercise plan. Tai chi is a low-impact exercise that takes you through a series of slow, beautiful motions. The bonus? It is both calming and strengthening, so helps reduce stress as well.
- Take a class! A Matter of Balance is designed to build strength and balance, increase activity levels, reduce fear of falling, and change your environment to reduce fall risk factors so you can move around confidently.

- Try [these exercise](#) ideas to get started at home.

## Maintain the right blood pressure

When your blood pressure drops quickly, there is not enough blood getting to your brain and muscles, making you feel dizzy and disoriented – and more likely to fall. This can happen when you stand or sit up suddenly, especially in the morning when blood pressure is naturally lower. But it can also happen after a large meal or exercise, while straining on the toilet, or when you feel anxious or panicky.

One of the most important ways to manage this dizziness is to drink enough water. Water helps you maintain the right blood pressure so your blood can get where it needs to go quickly. Also, if you are taking medication for high blood pressure and are having this type of dizziness, check in with your doctor about it. You can also [try these other tips](#) for managing dizziness due to low blood pressure.

## Watch your medications

Some medicines, or combinations of medicines, can make you sleepy or dizzy or cause you to fall. You may find that a medication that never bothered you before now causes dizziness. Or the dizziness may have started when you added a new medication. Make sure your doctor and pharmacist know all the medicines you are taking (including over-the-counter), so they can make sure the medicines are safe to take together.

If you notice any of these symptoms, talk with your doctor. There may be a problem with your medications.

- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Feeling about to faint, passing out or falling
- Headaches, blurry or tunnel vision
- Feeling vague or muddled
- Feeling pressure across the back of your shoulders or neck
- Feeling nauseous or hot and clammy
- Weakness and fatigue

Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review your medicines on a regular basis (annually), including over-the-counter.

## **Know your *vestibular* (balance) system**

Another important part of balance is the [vestibular system](#). On either side of your head, in your inner ear, is a space filled with fluid that helps you know if you are right side up, upside down, or something in between. We don't think about this essential system until something goes wrong with it and the room is suddenly spinning. If you have trouble with motion sickness, dizziness or vertigo, talk with your doctor. Vestibular problems can be connected with hearing problems, so be sure to discuss it when you get your annual hearing exam.

## **Take care of your eyes**

Your eyes not only help you see what is in your path, they also help you judge depth so you know where to place your foot to step off the curb or make it to the next stair. Get your eyes checked every year and get the right glasses for the activities you do.

## **Remove the obstacle course at home**

Why make this harder than it has to be? Use a checklist to make your home safer, with tips like these:

- Remove papers, books, clothes, shoes and pet toys from the floor and stairs
- Remove small throw rugs or use double-sided tape to keep the rugs from slipping
- Use non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors
- Put grab bars put next to and inside the tub or shower and next to the toilet
- Keep items you use often in cabinets you can reach easily without using a step stool
- Improve the lighting in your home so you can see, and hang shades to reduce glare
- Have handrails and lights installed on all staircases
- Wear shoes (not slippers) both inside and outside the house

## Let people know

You don't have to do this on your own. The CDC "[My Mobility Plan](#)" tool can help you develop a plan for home, health and community.

Share your results with your healthcare provider, as well as:

- Share your history of recent falls
- Talk to your family members - enlist their support in taking simple steps to stay safe!

[Take an evidence-based fall prevention program:](#)

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