

Falls: Living Safely by Reducing Risk

The hearing and balance mechanisms are intricately connected. At Clark Audiology we strive to keep people fully engaged through maintaining strong communication ties with others. To maintain this full engagement it is important that we all maintain safe living environments. This includes avoiding the risk of a serious fall. In addition to following the tips for safety below, if you are experiencing balance difficulties, we encourage you to bring this fact to your physician's attention.

Remaining active as one ages includes taking balance problems seriously. More money is spent in the United States on the provision of health care services during the last few weeks of one's life than during an entire lifetime. Quite often these expenses arise from preventable falls. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, every year more than 20,000 elderly persons in the United States die as a result of falls. Current trends suggest that more than one third of the population over age 65 years will fall in a given year.

Tips for Your Safety

The serious injuries, lengthy recoveries and frequent deaths that may follow a fall can often be avoided by following these simple suggestions.

- Make an appointment with your physician to review your medications and health conditions that may increase your risk of falls. Ask about an appropriate exercise program to increase your flexibility, balance and muscle strength.
- Know which of your medications (singularly or in combination) may cause dizziness, vertigo or cognitive impairment and investigate alternative medicines with your physician.
- If you need glasses, wear them regularly. Have your vision checked if you have not done so in the past 24 months.
- If you have been advised to use a cane or walker, use it. Canes prevent falls in only one direction. Walkers are superior.
- Keep your home brightly lit with 100-watt bulbs. Ensure adequate lighting when walking inside and outside of your home especially on porches and walkways. Store flashlights in easy to find locations in case of a power outage. Do not try to save money by using inadequate lighting. If you will be returning home after dark, leave a light on. Place night lights in your bedroom, bathroom and hallways.

- Install handles and railings, preferably on both sides of stairways. Put nonslip treads on bare wood steps.
- Mount grab bars inside and just outside of the shower or bathtub. Install a raised toilet seat or one with armrests for stabilization. Place a nonskid mat and a sturdy plastic seat in the shower or tub.
- Avoid rapid changes in elevation such as when getting up quickly to answer the telephone or door.
- Secure loose rugs with double-faced tape or a slip-resistant backing. Use nonskid floor wax. Immediately clean spilled liquids, grease or food from the floor.
- Be sure to check for pets or children under foot. Remove clutter and other obstacles from under foot. Move coffee tables, magazine racks and plant stands from high-traffic areas. Remove clutter, electrical cords and phone cords from walkways.
- Avoid high-heeled shoes, slippers and flip flops. Wear sturdy shoes with flat nonskid soles.
- Establish a support network of family, friends or neighbors who will check in on you or assist in emergencies.
- Get and use a:
Life Alert (www.lifealert.com),
Alert-1 Medical alert ([www.alert- 1.com/Medical Alert.com](http://www.alert-1.com/Medical_Alert.com)),
Mobile Help (www.mobilehelpnow.com) or similar system for use in emergencies.

Further information: <http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/adultfalls.html>