

# FALLS PREVENTION GUIDE

**Exercise Regularly • Keep Your Bones Strong • Go For Regular Eye Checks  
Wear Well-Fitting Non-Slip Shoes • Keep Your Home Safe And Neat**



**For Caregivers**

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# Introduction



## What is a fall?

Falls can be serious. It is not part of ageing and you can prevent falls for your loved ones. A fall happens when someone ends up on the floor or a lower level accidentally. When a child falls, they stand right back up or sustain minor bruises that heal in a matter of days. For seniors however, a fall can be serious. Seniors often sustain injuries, from simple cuts and bruises to bone fractures after a fall. When this happens, it may take weeks or months to recover and this disrupts their lives. In severe cases, falling can cause seniors to lose their independence.

In Singapore, about one in five seniors aged 65 or older fall each year and many of them experience repeated falls. While falls may happen due to accidents, many of these **falls are preventable**.

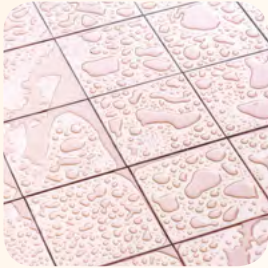


## Causes of falls

There are many reasons why falls happen. Seniors' risk of falling increases when they:

- Have fallen before.
- Have poor balance or difficulty walking independently.
- Have chronic conditions such as arthritis, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke or Parkinson's disease.
- Have postural hypotension (a drop in blood pressure when one switches position - for example from sitting to standing after a two-minute period) which can lead to loss of consciousness or fainting.
- Have a weaker control of their bladder (urinary incontinence) and frequently need to go to the bathroom.
- Take a lot of medication. The use of four or more types of prescribed drugs puts seniors at a higher risk of falling due to possible counteracting side-effects which can cause one to be drowsy.
- Have dementia, depression or self-perceived poor health.
- Do not have clear vision or wear glasses with a wrong prescription.
- Wear inappropriate footwear or have foot problems.

- Have hazards in the home such as:



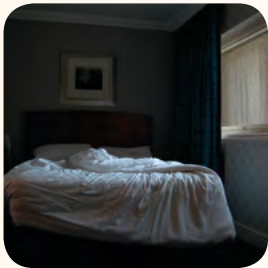
Slippery floors



Loose carpets  
or rugs



Loose cords  
or wires



Poor lighting



Poor step and  
stairway design  
at home



Chairs and beds  
that are too high  
or too low



Clutter





### **Falls can result in:**

- Physical consequences such as fractures, difficulty or inability to move around independently.
- Social consequences such as loss of independence, decreased quality of life, loss of social contacts.
- Psychological consequences such as fear of falling again or loss of self-esteem due to use of walking aids.

These consequences can result in a lower quality of life.

**Is your care-recipient at risk of falling? Do this simple risk assessment with him or her. Put a tick (✓) if he/she answers yes to the question:**

Question	Yes
Have you fallen in the past 12 months?	
Do you avoid going out because you are afraid of falling?	
Do you feel like you are going to fall when standing up or walking?	

Source: Alexandra Health System

If he/she is aged 65 or older and answered 'yes' to any of these questions, he/she is at a higher risk of falling. Try the tips outlined in this guide to reduce his/her risk of falls.

If he/she has fallen or come close to falling, talk to your doctor for a further falls risk assessment.

# Reduce The Risk Of Falls

Seniors' risk of falling can be reduced by making some changes in their daily activities. Simple steps can make a big difference. Here's what the seniors can do:

## 1. Exercise Regularly

- Lower body strength and balance exercises are most effective in reducing the risk of falling when done at least twice a week.
- For substantial health benefits, seniors should also aim for 150 minutes of physical activity each week.
- Help seniors plan for regular physical activities that fit his or her interests and abilities. When in doubt, you can ask your family doctor about the type of physical activity that is best for him or her.



Visit  
**[www.HealthyAgeing.sg/  
Exercise](http://www.HealthyAgeing.sg/Exercise)**  
to download a free  
exercise video featuring  
7 easy strength, balance  
and flexibility exercises  
for seniors.



2. Keep Your Bones Strong

- When bones are weak, they tend to break more easily. This is known as osteoporosis. Calcium is the building block for strong bones and we should ensure seniors have sufficient calcium every day.
- A senior aged 51 years or older requires 1,000mg of calcium every day. In the following illustration, 1 star equals to 100mg of calcium. Aim to help them achieve 10 calcium stars every day from a variety of foods.

1 calcium ★ = 100mg of calcium  
Daily requirement (51 years old or older)  
is 1000mg of calcium

Breakfast:



1 glass of high-calcium low-fat milk (250ml)



Lunch:



1 square piece of taukwa (100g)



1/4 plate of cooked chye sim

Dinner:



1/4 plate of cooked kai lan



=

10 Calcium Stars



Seniors need a total of 10 calcium stars a day.



**Calcium Stars**  
(per item)



1 glass of low-fat high-calcium milk (250ml) / 4 scoops milk powder



1 glass of soybean milk with HCS (250ml)



2 pieces of canned low-sodium sardines (140g)



**Calcium Stars**  
(per item)



2 square pieces of taukwa (200g)



1/4 plate of cooked chye sim + 1/4 plate of cooked spinach



**Calcium Stars**  
(per item)



1/4 plate of cooked kai lan



1 slice of low-fat cheese (20g)



1 cup of cooked soy beans (180g)



**Calcium Stars**  
(per item)



1/2 pack of tofu (150g)



1/4 cup of almonds (30g)

## **Vitamin D**

- Vitamin D helps our body absorb calcium from the food we eat. It can be found in eggs, cod liver oil or fatty fish such as tuna, salmon and sardines but the best way to obtain sufficient Vitamin D is to take a walk outdoors when the sun is up. Just 15 to 30 minutes of daily sunlight exposure is all we need. However, avoid outdoor activities during the hottest period of the day (10.30 am to 3.30 pm).

## **What if the senior does not drink milk or eat foods rich in calcium?**

- You may want to consider introducing calcium and Vitamin D supplements in his or her diet. Always consult a doctor before starting any supplements for him or her.

## **3. Go for Regular Eye Checks**

- Bring them to an eye care professional once a year to have their vision and glasses prescription checked. This will help ensure they have clear vision or the right glasses with the right prescription and identify eye conditions such as glaucoma or cataracts.

## 4. Wear Well-Fitting Non-Slip Shoes

### Tips on selecting shoes for a senior:

- Choose non-slip footwear with buckle, laces or Velcro straps for better grip.

✓



X



Rocker Bottom soles



- Avoid shoes with rocker bottom soles (as shown above).
- Choose well-fitting shoes. Wearing oversized shoes can cause one to trip.
- Avoid heavy shoes.
- Remember to change their shoes when worn out as shoes will lose their grip with frequent use.

Consult a podiatrist if you require personalised advice.

## 5. Keep Your Home Safe And Neat

Home is where the seniors spend a lot of time and where majority of falls happen. A few simple steps can make their home safer. Use this checklist to identify risks and what you can do to make their home safer.

### Home Safety Checklist

Floors	Yes	No	What you should do if you answer "No"?
1. Are the carpets or mats set flat on the floor without wrinkles or curled edges?			Remove all loose mats or ensure they are firmly secured.
2. Are the mats laid out on the floor with slip resistant backing?			Use mats with slip resistant backing. A slip resistant backing mat will stick to the floor and will stop the mat from sliding when you step on it.
3. Are spills cleaned up and wiped dry immediately?			Keep your floor dry at all times to prevent you from slipping on wet surfaces.
4. Is the floor free from clutter?			Stack magazines, newspapers and keep items such as toys, shoes, etc. off the floor.
5. Are electrical or phone cords safely tucked away?			Tuck electrical and phone cords against the walls. Secure them so that they are out of the walkways.
6. Are floor surfaces non-slip?			Wipe floor surfaces dry. Put a carpet with a non-slip underlay over polished floors.

Lighting	Yes	No	What you should do if you answer "No"?
7. Is there sufficient lighting in all rooms?			For dimly lit rooms in the home, install brighter bulbs.
8. Are light switches easy to reach?			Install lamps if need be.
9. Can light be easily switched on from your care recipient's bed?			Consider installing movement activated lights or place a lamp on a side table beside the bed.
Stairs & Steps	Yes	No	What you should do if you answer "No"?
10. If there are stairs in the home, are there clear markers on the steps?			Consider using non-slip bright coloured tape to mark out the edges of steps so it can be clearly seen.
11. Do the stairs have sturdy hand rails? (For stairs outside your home e.g. in your HDB area)			Contact your town council and let them know your concern. The contact number can be found on the HDB's notice board.
12. Are the markers on the steps in good condition? Are stair areas well lit? (For stairs outside your home e.g. in your HDB area)			



Kitchen	Yes	No	What you should do if you answer “No”?
13. Can commonly used items be reached without having to climb or bend too low?			Place commonly used items on shelves that can be easily reached. If these are items that are used for cooking, keep them close to the stove.
14. Is there a table in the kitchen?			<b>Advice for “YES”:</b> If there is a table in the kitchen, make sure that it is sturdy enough to support your weight when you lean it.
Bathroom	Yes	No	What you should do if you answer “No”?
15. Is the shower area and the area just outside the shower non-slip?			Use non-slip mats if the shower area or area outside the shower is slippery. Non-slip mats are available at supermarkets or your neighbourhood hardware stores.
16. Are toiletries within easy reach from the shower area?			Place toiletries near the shower area so it can be easily reached.
17. Is your care-recipient able to get out of the shower without holding on to taps or towel rails?			Install handrails or grab bars or a ramp.
18. Is your care-recipient able to easily get on and off the toilet seat?			If you are staying in an HDB flat, you may call HDB at 1800-933-2990 between 8am to 5pm on weekdays (excluding Public Holidays) for more information on subsidies through their Enhancement For Active Seniors (EASE) – for new home improvements to make HDB homes more elderly friendly or visit <a href="http://www.hdb.gov.sg/EASE">www.hdb.gov.sg/EASE</a> for more information.
19. Is the bathroom floor free from kerbs?			

Bedroom	Yes	No	What you should do if you answer “No”?
20. Are blankets neatly folded? Are bedsheets properly tucked under the mattress?			Fold the blanket daily and keep bedsheets properly tucked to keep floors clear.
21. Does your care-recipient use a walking aid and/or glasses, and is he or she able to reach it easily when they get out of bed?			Make sure his/her walking aid and eye glasses are within reach. Put a tape marker on them to see easily.
22. Does your care-recipient feel giddy when he or she steps out of bed?			<b>Advice for “YES”:</b> Advise them to sit at the edge of their bed and wait a while before standing up. Some medication can cause giddiness, consult the doctor if you are not familiar with the medication.



## Medications

- Bring all medication and supplements to a local pharmacist or family doctor at least once a year or when there are changes to their health condition.
- Ask about side effects, especially if they are taking 4 or more types of medication. Some medication or combinations of medication can cause drowsiness or giddiness. Ask your pharmacist or doctor what you can do to help them manage their medication.
- Always consult the doctor before letting them start any medication.



## Environmental Risks

There will be environmental risk factors in public areas. In such circumstances, it is advisable that you or someone guides and helps the seniors modify their behaviours and adapt to the environment.

### Helpful measures:

- Ensure they concentrate when walking and that they do not multi-task such as talk on the mobile phone while walking.
- Let them use the lift instead of the escalator where possible.
- Do not rush. For example, do not cross the road when the traffic light is blinking.
- Ensure that they wait till the bus or train has fully stopped before preparing to stand up to alight.
- Avoid letting them go out at night especially if they have poor vision. Remind them to bring along their spectacles at all times.
- Avoid going to crowded areas or going out when it is raining.
- Ensure that they wear well-fitting shoes with non-slip soles.
- Ensure that they use appropriate walking aids as advised by a doctor or therapist. If needed, have a helper by their side to assist and give them the necessary support.

# How To Help Someone Get Up From A Fall

Here is how you can help someone get up from a fall.



**1** Calm them down and let them lie down while you check for injuries. Ask if they can move.



**2** Help them lightly roll to their side and let them rest if there are no significant injuries or pain. Meanwhile, place two chairs nearby as shown in the illustration.



**3** When they feel strong enough, help them get onto all fours and move towards the nearest chair.



**4** Guide them to place both arms on a chair as support and prop themselves into a kneeling position.



**5** Guide them into a half standing position and place the second chair behind to sit.



**6** Guide them to push up and sit back on the chair. Remember not to lift them as undetected injuries may be aggravated if you pull them. Keep your back upright when assisting.



**7** Let them rest and check again for injuries. Seek medical help if needed.

Source: No Falls Brochure (2012) Changi General Hospital



# Managing Injuries After a Fall



## When to monitor the condition at home?

Some falls are minor and may only result in bruises and cuts. If the fall is minor, monitor the condition at home over the next 2-3 days. Seek treatment at your family doctor if the condition does not improve.

**Tip:** Ensure you have a first aid kit for these minor injuries.



## When to visit your family doctor?

Some falls may not have visible injuries. If the senior complains of new symptoms such as headaches, nausea, dizziness or temporary ringing in the ears within a few days after a fall, it could be a minor head injury. A persistent pain in the limbs may be a sprain or minor fracture.

**Consult a doctor for a physical examination.**



## When to call an ambulance?

**Some falls that are more severe are medical emergencies. Here are the signs of a severe fall:**

- If the person is unconscious.
- If there is severe pain.
- If the person is unable to move or get up from his/her fall.
- If there is breathing difficulty. If breathing stops, start CPR if you are trained.
- If there is fluid or blood from nose, ears or mouth.
- If the fall involves injury to the head, neck, hips or thighs.

**Call 995** if any of these situations should happen. Do not attempt to move the senior. Keep him or her warm with a blanket or towel.

Have a plan in place that the senior could get in touch with for help in the event of an emergency.

# Useful Resources

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To help seniors learn about falls prevention

Show them this video on **[www.HealthyAgeing.sg/FallsPrevention](http://www.HealthyAgeing.sg/FallsPrevention)**

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For more healthy living tips and information for seniors

Visit **[www.HealthyAgeing.sg](http://www.HealthyAgeing.sg)** or  
Call HealthLine at  
1800 223 1313 (toll-free number)  
to speak to a Nurse Adviser.  
  
Operating hours:  
Mondays – Fridays: 8.30am to 5pm  
Saturdays: 8.30am to 1pm  
Closed on Public Holidays

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For subsidised home improvements by HDB

Visit **[www.hdb.gov.sg/EASE](http://www.hdb.gov.sg/EASE)**  
to learn more about the  
Enhancement for Active  
Seniors (EASE) programme

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For more caregivers' resources and eldercare information

Visit the Singapore Silver Pages  
at **[www.silverpages.sg](http://www.silverpages.sg)**,  
a one-stop portal for  
caregiver resources and  
eldercare information

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For subsidised walking aids, spectacles, hearing aids and home healthcare items

Visit **[www.aic.sg/SMF](http://www.aic.sg/SMF)** to find  
out more about the Seniors'  
Mobility and Enabling Fund

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For products and simple solutions to help seniors live safely at home

Visit the ABLE Studio Webpage  
on **[www.theablestudio.com.sg](http://www.theablestudio.com.sg)**

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For more information,  
contact Healthline **1800 223 1313**  
or visit **[www.HealthyAgeing.sg/FallsPrevention](http://www.HealthyAgeing.sg/FallsPrevention)**

An initiative under the Action Plan for Successful Ageing