

Q. What can I do to prevent falls?

A. Falling is not just a problem for old people. When the popular singer Justin Bieber stepped on stage to perform in London with Taylor Swift, fans went wild. But during the last song of the concert, he tripped over some equipment. Bieber lost his balance, stumbled down a ramp, and twisted his ankle. After an ambulance ride and an x-ray, doctors told Bieber his foot was fractured. And he had to wear a cast for six weeks.

People fall and get hurt a lot. Every 11 seconds someone is treated in an emergency room for a fall, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. An estimated 2.8 million a year people need medical care after falling. Millions more who fall and get hurt treat cuts, bruises, aches, and sprains at home. Fortunately, there are a number of things you can do to prevent falls.

First, Recognize Risk Factors for Falls

While the risk of falling increases with age, it's not the only factor that can trip you up. If you want to avoid falling, you need to know what might cause you to stumble. The most common factors that lead to falls include:

- **A history of falling.** If you stumble and fall and need medical care, doctors will ask if you have a history of falling. Why? The more often you fall, the more likely you'll fall again. Knowing this can help you create a plan to prevent future falls.
- **Poor hydration.** When you don't drink enough water, it can impact your brain and your muscles. You might get confused, feel dizzy, or faint. These are common side effects of poor hydration.
- **Exhaustion.** If you're under a lot of stress and you're not



sleeping well, it's going to take a toll that can impact your judgement and balance.

- **Lack of nutrition.** This is a common problem for young children and seniors who don't want to eat, or forget to eat. Poor nutrition can impact your blood pressure, weaken your bones and muscles, and increase your risk for falls.¹
- **Too much alcohol.** Drinking too much impairs brain function and balance, putting you at risk for falling. And it doesn't take long for that to happen. Alcohol reaches your brain just six minutes after drinking it.²
- **Side effects of medicines.** Medicines do a lot of good. They help control blood pressure, blood sugar, weight, heart disease, mood, and even allergies or the common cold. But they can impact balance and judgement.
- **Weak bones and muscles.** Strong bones and muscles can help prevent falls. But if you're not getting regular exercise, your fall risk goes up.
- **Slips and trips.** Most falls (66%)³ are caused by slips and trips. Things like clutter

on the floor, loose or curled throw rugs, and wet floors can cause you to lose balance.

How to Prevent Falls

Once you know what factors increase your risk for falls, take action to prevent falls.⁴ Here's how:

- Strengthen your bones and muscles with balance and core-strength exercises
- Get your vision checked
- Clear your home or work space of any obstacles
- Ask your doctor about side effects of any medicines you're taking
- Get 7 to 8 hours of sleep a night
- Stay hydrated
- Eat healthy foods

If you don't want to wear a cast for six weeks like Bieber, or end up in a hospital bed from a fall, reduce your risk by making these habit part of your everyday life.

References

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