



**Preventing Falls...
One Step at a Time**

As a caregiver, you have to find the balance between ensuring your loved one is safe and healthy and respecting her independence and right to make decisions for herself. A single fall can change someone's life significantly. Protecting someone you care for from falls requires flexibility, patience and persistence.

Don't let someone you care about become afraid of falling. People who fall (or nearly fall) may develop a fear of falling and modify their behavior in ways that actually increase their risk of falling again, such as becoming less active and changing the way they walk. A Matter of Balance is a free, community-based workshop that can help your loved one (and you) learn to see falls as something that can be controlled. Visit www.steadyu.ohio.gov to find a workshop near you.

Talk about falls prevention... often. Many older adults may be reluctant to talk about falling because they see it as a threat to their independence. Bring the topic up frequently with your loved one and be persistent, but respectful. If he says he doesn't want to talk about it, that's OK, but bring the topic up again, soon.

- Assure him that falling is not a normal part of aging and that most falls can be prevented.
- Use tools like the Falls Risk Self-assessment to help him see his health and environment in new ways.
- Share stories of others you know who have fallen, even your own experiences; ask open-ended questions like: "what could she have done to prevent that fall?"

Help your loved one remain physically active. Any type of movement helps, from simply lifting your legs while you watch TV and marching in place in the kitchen, to walking and swimming, to exercise programs like yoga and tai chi.

- Build on activities that she enjoys and talk with her about things she'd like to try.
- Find out about local exercise programs for older adults by contacting your local senior center, community action agency or agency on aging.
- Discuss any new or intensified exercise or activity with a doctor to ensure that the activity is safe and appropriate.
- Ask her doctor about inner-ear conditions and medication side effects.
- Make sure she has her vision checked regularly, that her glasses fit properly and that she wears them when she's active.
- Offer to exercise with her.

Don't ignore chronic pain. Individuals with severe chronic pain are up to 77 percent more likely to fall than those without pain. Pain can cause your loved one to resist activity and exercise. Likewise, some pain medications can make him less stable on his feet.

- Talk with your doctor and your loved one about the pain he experiences and the best ways to treat the underlying causes of the pain.
- Learn strategies for coping with and reducing pain, such as distraction and relaxation exercises, and balancing activity. Healthy U is a program that can help; contact your area agency on aging (1-866-243-5678) to find a workshop near you.

Include your loved one in decisions about changes to her home. There are many simple and inexpensive changes that can significantly reduce the risk of slipping, tripping and falling. However, the decision to change her home must be hers. Suggest small changes first (e.g., rugs, night lights) and work your way up to bigger modifications (e.g., grab bars).

Encourage appropriate use of assistive devices. Folding step stools with hand rails are a far safer alternative to reaching high places than chairs or other furniture. Other devices, such as tools for reaching and grabbing, can keep a loved one from over-extending and losing balance. Walkers and canes can help with balance.

- Be sure canes and walkers are the right size and properly adjusted for your loved one (i.e., with the handle at wrist height).
- Regularly check the rubber tips on canes and walkers and replace them if they appear worn, dried out or damaged.
- If your loved one uses a cane or walker while out and about, he should use them to get around the house as well.

Promote good nutrition and hydration. A balanced diet with a variety of vegetables and calcium-rich foods promotes overall general health and minimizes the symptoms of some chronic illnesses. Staying properly hydrated prevents low blood pressure, dizziness, fatigue and confusion.

- Offer a variety of beverage choices, such as different flavorings and various temperatures.
- Encourage your loved one to eat fruits and vegetables that help with hydration, such as watermelon and applesauce.
- Encourage frequent trips to the bathroom or suggest a regular schedule to prevent her from having to go in a hurry.
- Talk with her and her doctor about medical conditions and medications that can cause dehydration or frequent urination.

For more tips and resources to prevent falls, visit:

www.steadyu.ohio.gov