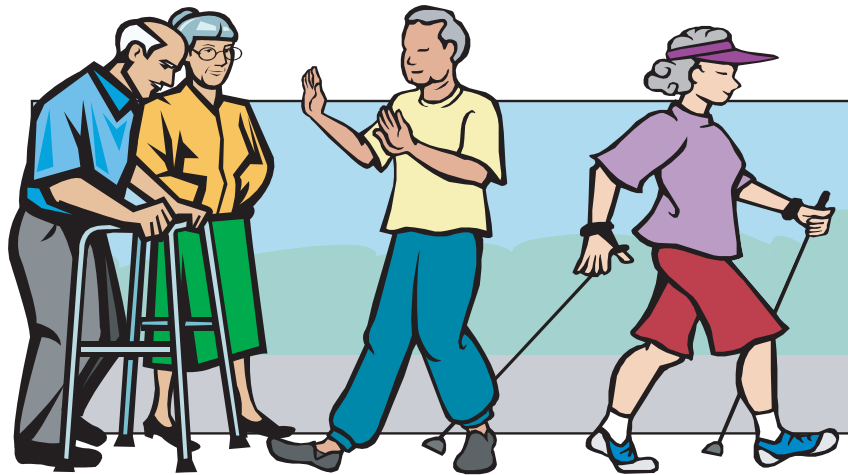


Fall Prevention Handbook



HELPING YOU STAY ACTIVE AND SAFE

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FALL PREVENTION HANDBOOK

Introduction

VNA of Middlesex-East is pleased to be providing home health services to you. Our goal is to help you regain your health and independence. One of the most important things we can do to help you recover safely is to teach you how to prevent falls and injuries.

Falls are a leading cause of accidental injury and death in the United States with older adults at the greatest risk. Two in ten patients who need homecare after being hospitalized will fall during the first month after coming home. The most profound effect of falling is the loss of your independence. After sustaining a fall-related injury, nearly 50% of elderly patients are discharged from the hospital to a nursing home, rather than return home.

The fear of falling itself can lead to loss of self-confidence and inactivity, thereby decreasing your quality of life and increasing your risk of falls. Please take the time to review this book to understand your risk factors for falling and what you can do to remain active in a safe manner. Your clinician will make fall prevention a top priority in your care plan; please follow her suggestions for safety closely and seek your clinician's advice if you have questions.



LEARN WHAT YOU CAN DO TO STAY ACTIVE IN A SAFE MANNER.

Understanding Medical Risk Factors



Many medical conditions are part of aging and cannot be changed. Learning how these conditions may lead to falls is the first step in understanding how to manage risk factors. Your clinician will fully explain the risk factors associated with your individual medical condition.

Heart Disease may cause the following symptoms which increase the risk for falls:

- Dizziness
- Balance problems
- Muscle weakness
- Heart disease is frequently associated with respiratory difficulties, which can result in many of the same fall-prone conditions.

Strokes are a result of decrease in blood flow to the brain and may cause:

- Muscle weakness
- Sensory imbalances on one side of the body that may compromise one's ability to move safely.

Blood Pressure: both low and elevated blood pressure (BP) may increase risk of falls

- Low BP may result in dizziness or fainting, especially if rising quickly
- Elevated BP may increase unsteadiness
- Be certain your BP medication is properly ordered and taken

Osteoporosis is a condition where the bones become more porous

- More prone to fractures
- Mobility impairment becomes an issue due to the decrease in bone density

Parkinson's Disease is a disease that affects the nervous system which may result in:

- Tremors, stiff aching muscles, and slow limited movement
- Persons are likely to take small steps and shuffle with his or her feet close together
- Stopped posture
- Difficulty turning around

All these problems may result in frequent falls, especially as the disease progresses.

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD): The shortness of breath that is caused by COPD can make you feel weak, dizzy or faint, even when you do simple things like get dressed or fix a meal.

Diabetes: Diabetes can cause a loss of feeling in the feet which compromises your balance and ability to sense obstacles. Low blood sugar can make you feel weak and dizzy.

Arthritis: The loss of joint flexibility due to arthritis makes it difficult to maintain a safe gait, to avoid potentially dangerous obstacles, and maintain balance.

Vision problems: A decrease in vision, whether caused by glaucoma and cataracts, or just aging eyes, makes it far more difficult to judge distance and avoid obstacles that could trip you up.

Hearing problems: Because we rely on sound for orientation in the environment, a person may not be as quickly aware of a potentially hazardous situation when hearing is decreased.

Mental Confusion: Mental confusion can increase the chance of a fall since it may be more difficult to determine whether an activity is putting one at greater risk, or it may take longer to respond to a situation where a fall might otherwise be averted.

Foot Problems: Foot pain caused by such conditions as thin heel pad, corns, bunions, dry and cracked skin, and ingrown toe nails can cause a change in the way you align your body, thereby increasing the risk for falls. Decreased sensation in the feet is a common problem for people with diabetes; however this also occurs gradually with the aging process.

Balance and Gait: A gradual decline in balance abilities and speed of gait occurs with age. This can cause tripping and stumbling when coordinated muscle movement becomes a little out of sync. A decrease in gait speed may cause a person to hurry to perform various activities. Trying to walk faster, particularly when it is associated with anxiety, can cause a fall.

Urinary and bladder dysfunction: These conditions can cause a drop in blood pressure, causing dizziness. They also create the need for frequent, urgent trips to the bathroom where you may make your way without regard for fall safety issues.

Medications: You may be taking a number of medications to help you manage any of the above conditions. Medications can heighten your chance of falling, especially if you are taking several types of medicines, several times a day. Single or multiple medications can cause side effects such as dizziness, drowsiness, weakness, or low blood pressure.

Dehydration: Many seniors do not take in enough fluids. Dehydration may cause blood pressure to drop and cause you to fall.

Insomnia: Not getting enough sleep will lead to exhaustion and increase your chances of falling.



TAKING SEVERAL TYPES OF MEDICINE A DAY CAN
HEIGHTEN YOUR CHANCE OF FALLING.

Taking Steps to Avoid Falls

Make Your Home Safer

The majority of falls take place either inside or in close proximity to the home. As we age, home safety becomes increasingly important. Hazards we could once ignore become serious risk factors for falling. Your clinician will conduct a safety assessment of your home environment and make recommendations that will help prevent falls.

Clutter: Remove things you can trip over (such as papers, books, clothes, and shoes) from stairs and places where you walk. Keep electrical and telephone cords out of the way.

Flooring: Should be dry and non-slip. Secure rugs and carpet edges with nonskid tape; do not use throw rugs.

Stairs: Stairs should be well lit and free of clutter. Put non-slip treads on bare, wooden steps. Install tightly fastened handrails running the entire length and along both sides of stairs. Apply brightly colored tape to the edge of the steps to make them more visible.

Lighting: Ensure lighting is adequate throughout your home, especially in hallways and stairs; have light switches placed at each end. Use lamp shades and frosted bulbs to reduce glare. Put in a bedside light with an easy on and off switch; use nightlights in the bedroom, hallways, and bathroom. Keep flashlights readily available in every room of your house.

YOU CAN TAKE A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO FALL PREVENTION BY DOING THE FOLLOWING:

- MAINTAIN YOUR STRENGTH AND BALANCE
- WEAR PROPER FITTING CLOTHES AND SHOES
- WEAR GLASSES AND HEARING AIDES IF NEEDED
- USE ADAPTIVE/SUPPORTIVE EQUIPMENT IF NEEDED
- UNDERSTAND AND MANAGE YOUR MEDICATIONS PROPERLY
- STAY HYDRATED
- TAKE YOUR TIME! DO NOT HURRY.

Living Area: Arrange furniture so you have a clear pathway between rooms. Avoid using chairs and sofas that are difficult to get in and out of. Remove caster wheels from furniture. Keep electric, appliance and telephone cords out of walkways, but don't put cords under a rug. Remove thresholds higher than 1/2 inch or mark them with brightly colored tape.

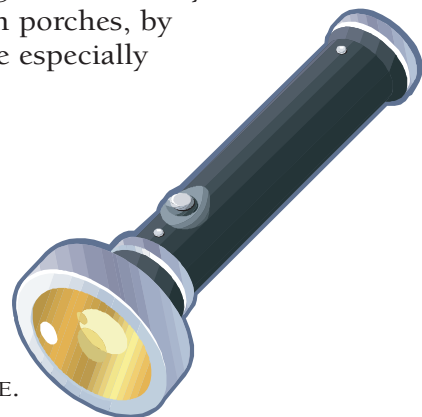
Phones: Keep a cordless phone or cellphone within reach during the day. Always locate a phone next to your bed. If you are away from your phone, let it ring. Do not rush to answer it.

Bedroom: Use a bed that is easy to get in and out of. If needed, install bedrails for extra safety. Make sure the bed cannot move. Arrange clothes in your closet so that they are easy to reach. If you use a walker, cane or wheelchair, keep it next to your bed when sleeping.

Kitchen: Keep commonly used items on easy to reach shelves, avoiding shelves that are too high or too low. Immediately clean up liquid and food spills on the floor. Use a long handled broom and dust pan.

Bathrooms: Make bathrooms safer by using non skid mats or appliqués in bathtubs and showers and placing a slip-resistant rug in front for safe entry and exit. A liquid soap dispenser mounted on the tub or shower wall will ensure you don't fall trying to pick up that slippery soap bar. Have grab bars installed on walls around the tub and beside the toilet that are strong enough to hold your weight. **Do not substitute towel racks for grab bars.** Using a raised toilet seat or special toilet seat with armrests will give you more stability. Also consider using a sturdy plastic seat in the bathtub if you struggle to lower yourself to the floor of the tub.

Outdoors: Repair cracks on sidewalks and driveways. Install handrails on stairs and steps leading into the home making sure the railing goes all the way to both the top and bottom steps. Install exterior lighting on porches, by doorways and along walkways; motion sensitive lights are especially helpful. Keep walkways clear of leaves and snow.



KEEP A FLASHLIGHT IN EVERY ROOM OF YOUR HOUSE.

Maintain Your Strength and Balance

Exercise will reduce your chances of falling. It makes you stronger and helps you feel better. It helps you react more quickly to obstacles in your path and other potential dangers. Seniors who are less active are more likely to fall because they lack the strength and balance they need to resist falls.

Start a regular exercise routine of any kind – even if it is a matter of taking only a few steps a day. Your goal is to improve your strength, balance and gait. The type of exercise activity is up to you. You may enjoy gardening, walking, biking, water aerobics or Tai Chi (especially good for balance). Choose something that is enjoyable to you so it is easy to make it a regular part of your day.

On the following pages, you will find simple exercise regimes to get you started. They are safe for most individuals; however, always check with your physician or homecare clinician to determine if your medical condition may present limitations to certain types of exercise.



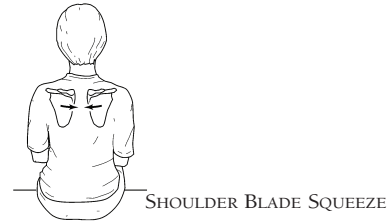
TAI CHI IS ESPECIALLY GOOD FOR BALANCE

Upper Body Exercises:

Follow your clinician's suggestions for how many times you should repeat each exercise (repetition) and how many times a week you should complete these exercises (frequency) for maximum benefit.

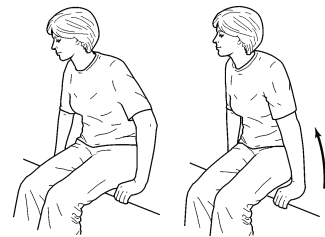
Shoulder Blade Squeeze

- Sit with your elbows at your sides.
- Slowly squeeze your shoulder blades together.
- Hold then return to the starting position.



Seated Push Ups

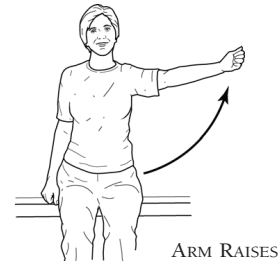
- Sit and lean forward slightly.
- Place your hands on the edge of the seating surface.
- Push down with your hands so that your elbows' straighten.
- Hold and then return to the starting position.



SEATED PUSH UPS

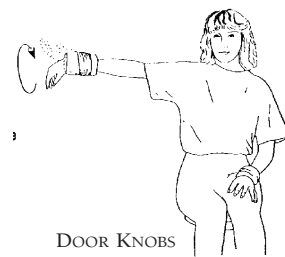
Arm Raises to the Front

- Start with your arm down at your side.
- Raise your arm in front of your body towards the ceiling keeping your elbow straight.
- Hold and then return slowly lowering your arm to your side.



Arm Raises to the Side

- Start with your arm down at your side.
- Raise your arm out to the side, keeping your elbow straight.
- Be sure your thumb is pointing up as you raise your arm.
- Hold and then return slowly.

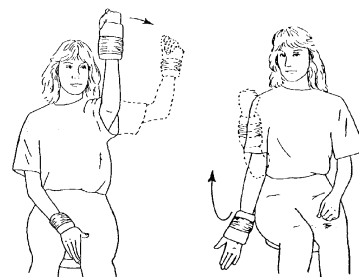


Door Knobs

- Hold your arm straight out to your side.
- Turn the palm of your hand up and down, rotating your entire arm.

Butterfly

- Raise your arm straight in front of you.
- Bend your elbow so your fist is pointing to the ceiling.
- Keep your fist pointed to the ceiling, swing your arm out to the side and then back in front of you.



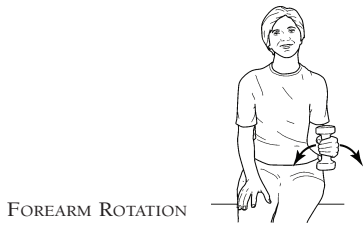
BUTTERFLY

BICEPS

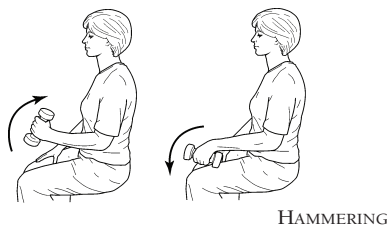
Biceps

- Keep your elbow tucked to your side.
- Slowly bend your elbow up and down.

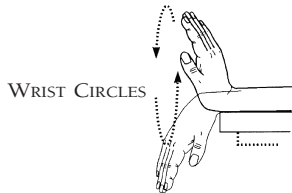
_____	Repetitions
_____	Frequency



FOREARM ROTATION

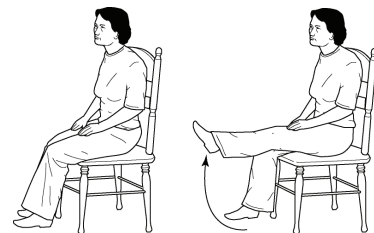


HAMMERING



WRIST CIRCLES

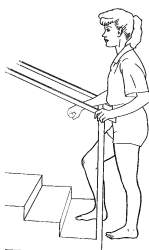
	Repetitions
	Frequency



KNEE EXTENSIONS



HIP FLEXION



STEP UPS

Forearm Rotation (with or without holding a light weight or can of soup)

- Bend your elbow to 90 degrees and tuck it into your side.
- Start with your palm up and turn your hand until the palm is down.
- Turn palm back up and repeat.

Hammering (with or without holding a light weight or can of soup)

- Start with your elbow at your side, bent at a 90-degree angle, with your thumb up.
- Bend your wrist down slowly.
- Hold and then slowly pull the wrist back up to the starting position.

Wrist Circles

- Rest your forearm on a table top or arm of a chair.
- Hang your wrist over the edge.
- Move your wrist to the right and to the left in circles.

Lower Body Exercises:

Knee Extensions

- Sit with feet slightly apart.
- Straighten one knee as you breathe out.
- Breathe in as your foot returns to the starting position.

Hip Flexion

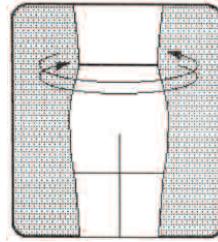
- Sit with feet slightly apart.
- Lift one knee up towards your shoulder as you breathe out.
- Breathe in as you return your knee to the starting position.

Step Ups

- Find a small step near something you can hold on to.
- Breathe out as you step up onto the step.
- Breathe in as you step down.
- Change to other leg and repeat.

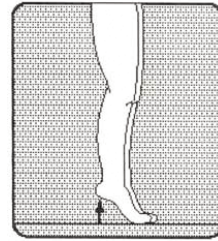
The Sink Hip Circle

- Stand facing kitchen sink.
- Hold on with both hands. Do not move shoulders or feet.
- Make a big circle to the left with hips.
- Repeat five times.
- Make a big circle to the right with hips.



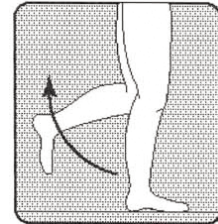
The Sink Toe Stand

- Stand facing kitchen sink.
- Hold on with both hands.
- Go up on your toes.
- Hold for count of 5. Then come down.



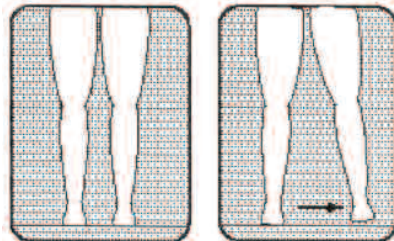
One Leg Sink Stand

- Stand facing kitchen sink.
- Hold on with both hands.
- Stand on your left leg for a count of 5.
- Stand on your right leg for a count of 5.



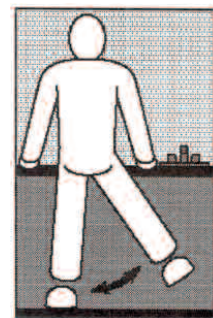
Sink Side Step

- Stand facing kitchen sink.
- Hold on with both hands.
- Move hands along kitchen sink as you step to left 5 steps.
- Step with both feet to right 5 steps.



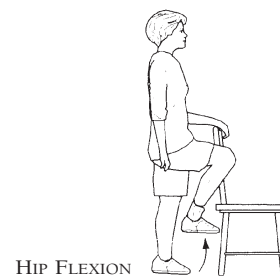
Two Hand Alternate Leg Out and In

- Stand facing kitchen sink.
- Hold on with both hands.
- Stand on your left leg and move right leg out to the side and back again.
- Repeat on opposite side.
- Continue to alternate each leg.



Hip Flexion

- Hold on to a stable railing, table or chair.
- Lift knee up as if marching, keep back straight.



HIP FLEXION

Wear Proper Fitting Shoes and Clothes

Wearing proper fitting shoes and clothes will help prevent falls. Comfortable shoes with nonskid soles are recommended. If you wear tie shoes, always check to make sure they are tied securely. Discard those stretched out slippers and high heels with smooth, slick soles and never walk in your stocking feet. Long and dangling clothing, such as pant or pajama legs that are too long, can cause you to trip.

Wear Eye Glasses and Hearing Aides if Needed

Eye Glasses

Periodic check-ups with an eye doctor are important to test for glaucoma and cataracts and to keep eye glass prescriptions up to date. If you wear bifocals, use extra caution on stairs as they can distort distances. You may want to use separate glasses for reading and distance if judging distances with your bifocals becomes a problem. Don't forget to clean your glasses daily to get the best view possible.

Hearing Aides

If you have a hearing aid, remember to wear it daily. We rely on sound for orientation. If your hearing is reduced you may not be as quickly aware of a potentially hazardous situation. It is recommended to have hearing checked regularly as we grow older.



Use Adaptive Supportive Equipment

Your clinician may recommend that you use adaptive supportive equipment. She may fit you for a cane or walker to help you stay mobile safely. Other safety devices she may recommend you acquire include grab bars, bath and shower seats, and raised toilet seats. Your clinician will help you locate places where you can purchase these aids and also help you determine if they are covered by your insurance.

A WALKER MAY BE RECOMMENDED TO HELP YOU STAY MOBILE SAFELY.

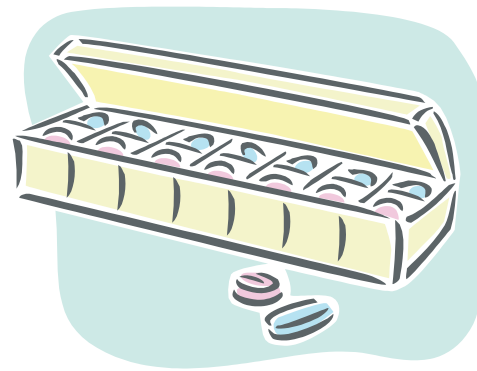
Consider a Medical Alert System

If you live alone, you may want to consider wearing a personal transmitter pendant so if you do fall, you can get help quickly. Medical alert services provide prompt help with a press of a button 24 hours a day. We can help connect you to a local provider and explain the costs associated with the service.

Understand and Manage Your Medications

Many types of drugs can contribute to falls by reducing mental alertness, affecting balance and gait, and causing drops in blood pressure while standing. People taking multiple medications are also at greater risk of falling.

- Keep a complete, dated list of the medications you take and bring it on every doctor's visit for a medication review. The list should include both prescriptions and non-prescription drugs you take.
- Discuss with your physician or pharmacist about using the lowest effective dosage, regularly assessing the need for continued medication, and the need for walking aids while taking prescriptions that affect your balance.
- Take medications as directed and use a medicine organizer to help properly manage them.
- Know the common side effects of all the medications you are taking. Share any side effects you are experiencing with your doctor.



Stay Hydrated

Remember to drink plenty of fluids and stay hydrated to prevent blood pressure drops that can result in falling. If you have a medical condition that limits your fluid intake, check with your physician for the appropriate amount that is safe for you.

What to Do If You Fall

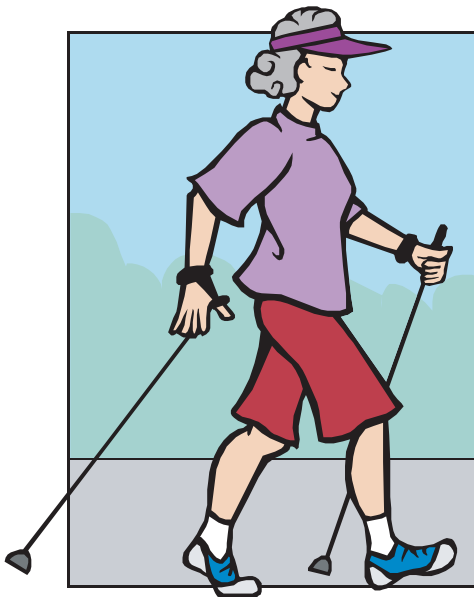
Getting up quickly or the wrong way could make an injury worse. If you are within reach of a phone, call for help; if you have a personal transmitter pendant, press the button for help. Sit for a few minutes before you try and do anything else.

If you need to get yourself up and you do not appear to be injured, try to move to a sturdy chair, sofa or bed. Roll onto your hands and knees and use the furniture to pull yourself up.

Your Personal Fall Prevention Plan

Our clinicians will prepare safety recommendations specifically for you and your home environment. Clinicians on subsequent visits will check to see if progress has been made on improving safety.

Please share this information with your family so they can help with the changes necessary to make your home a safer place as well as support you in adopting lifestyle changes that can decrease fall risk.



Falls are not a normal part of aging. Take the responsibility to understand your risk factors and the best ways to prevent a fall from happening. This will help you gain the confidence to stay active in a safe manner, preserving your independence and quality of life.

FOLLOWING YOUR CLINICIAN'S RECOMMENDATIONS WILL HELP YOU GAIN THE CONFIDENCE TO STAY ACTIVE IN A SAFE MANNER.

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