

# Slips, trips and falls

EYE CONNECT



Macular  
Disease  
Foundation  
AUSTRALIA



Vision loss doubles your risk for slips, trips and falls. However, you can take steps to increase your safety.

## Personal risk factors

Vision loss can decrease your ability to judge distances and depth, and to cope with sudden changes in light levels or glare. Other health problems that can increase your risk of a fall include stroke, Parkinson's disease, arthritis, diabetes, low blood pressure, dizziness, and poor nutrition.

Even short term illnesses, such as the flu or surgery, can temporarily increase your risk of falling. Any problems with your feet can also result in a slip, trip or a fall.

## What you can do:

- have regular check-ups with your eye health professional
- have regular check-ups with your doctor to ensure your medical conditions are well managed and medications are regularly reviewed
- keep as active as possible, including regular physical activity for 30 minutes every day (if possible)
- eat a well-balanced diet (especially eating eye-friendly foods) and drink an adequate and appropriate amount of water, especially in hot weather
- ensure you get enough sleep to reduce the risk of falling due to tiredness

## Environmental risk factors

Around half of all falls occur in the home, so it's important to make your home and surrounds as safe as possible. The following tips can help.

### General hazards

- keep floors free of clutter by removing rugs and mats, and keep walkways free whether indoors or outdoors
- avoid placing fans and heaters in walkways or in the middle of the room
- coil or tape cords and cables next to a wall, or tape down under furniture
- remove or repair torn or stretched carpet, or mats that curl or fold easily
- always wipe up liquid spills carefully as soon as they occur
- attach a contrasting, non-slip strip on the front edge of the steps
- make obstacles or hazards stand out by ensuring they're a contrasting colour to the walls and floor
- avoid heavily patterned floor coverings as they can make it hard to see small obstacles or the edges of steps
- outside, try to remove anything that throws shadows across paths
- keep outside paths clear of moss, slime and fallen leaves
- remove, or mark, even small changes in floor level with contrasting colour or tape so it's easily seen
- choose outside door mats with sloping edges
- check outdoor paths for cracks and uneven areas, and make repairs as soon as possible

- check where your pet is located before you move

### Lighting

- make sure you have good lighting and avoid poorly lit places
- allow time for your eyes to adjust when walking from light to dark areas, and vice versa
- turn lights on before you walk around
- two-way light switches (two or more switches that control the one light) can help in corridors, on stairs, or in rooms where there is more than one entry
- decrease daytime glare with curtains or blinds on your windows
- leave lights on in the hallway at night or consider low voltage night lights or sensor lights
- use the torch function on your smartphone



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### Staying safe at home

- if possible, install handrails in the bath, shower, toilet and other difficult areas
- mark any changes to flooring levels inside and outside, such as a lip when entering the shower
- use handrails whenever they are available, especially when walking up stairs, and take your time
- count stairs so you don't miss the last one
- avoid anything that involves you getting up higher than floor level, but if necessary use a sturdy step ladder and take care

### Fearing a fall

It can be normal to fear having a fall. However, people who are worried about falling sometimes restrict their activity, gradually doing less and less and losing their confidence.

### What you can do:

- talk with an occupational therapist, doctor, or counsellor to help regain your confidence, or address your concerns, particularly if your fear is very strong or if you are feeling lonely or isolated

### If you have a fall

Most falls don't result in serious injury, but many people are unable to get up without help. Therefore, it's important to think ahead and make a plan in case you have a fall. If you fall:

- don't panic, **STAY CALM**, catch your breath and compose yourself after the shock
- check your body and think about getting up if you're not injured
- if you're injured, stay where you are
- decide whether or not to get up

## If you can't get up

- take your time and work to your prepared plan or think through your actions calmly to attract attention and help
- activate your personal alarm, if you have one
- seek professional medical help immediately to treat any injuries

## After a fall

It's important to talk to your doctor about your fall and what may have caused it. You should also tell someone else (family, friend or neighbour) that you've fallen. Try to identify the reasons or contributing factors that resulted in your fall so you can take steps to minimise your risk of another fall.

**"After a foot operation, I attended a local Falls Prevention Program and they taught me balance and strength exercises, and gave movement tips to help prevent falls. They also showed me how to get up safely if I did have a fall. I found the course very helpful, and now feel more confident whilst out walking."**

**– Jean**

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## Need more information?

Contact us today.

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