



FALLS ARE THE LEADING CAUSE OF INJURY and accidental death in adults over the age of 65. Clutter and other tripping hazards, poor balance, and distractions can all cause a person to stumble and fall.

Some people become so afraid of falling (or after an actual fall) that they stop doing activities they used to enjoy. An occupational therapy practitioner uses your daily activities as the basis of therapy to help ensure that you can safely do the things you want and need to do. The following tips were shared by occupational therapy practitioners to help older adults reduce their risk of falls.

To reduce your risk of falling you can:

Remove clutter in your home, and walk carefully when there are potential hazards, such as throw rugs and pets underfoot.

Never stand on chairs or similar items to get to something you can't reach. Ask for help, or use a sturdy stool with hand rail or a ladder.

Do not use towel bars, sink edges, etc. for support because they could come away from the wall.

Use a nightlight in the bedroom and bathroom.

An occupational therapy practitioner will:

Suggest furniture arrangement that provides plenty of room to walk freely. If you hold onto furniture for balance, he or she will advise whether it is heavy enough to do that safely or suggest alternatives. Recommend removing throw rugs or securing them firmly to the floor.

Review your entire home and be sure you can safely and easily get to the items you use on a regular basis. Help create a plan for accessing things that are used most frequently, as well as those stored in hard-to-reach places (e.g., seasonal items, special china, etc.).

Recommend installing railings and grab bars throughout your home in locations that are appropriate for you. Recommend putting nonslip strips or a rubber mat on the floor of the tub or shower to prevent slipping.

Evaluate the lighting throughout your home. Suggest adding lighting to potentially unsafe areas (e.g., basement stairs) or routine work areas and be sure all the lighting provides good illumination while reducing glare.

To reduce your risk of falling you can:

Immediately wipe spills off the floor, and use a rubber-backed bathmat to prevent the bathroom floor from getting wet. Even a small amount of water can lead to a slip.

Stay active to maintain overall strength, endurance, and balance.

Know your limitations. If there is a task you cannot easily complete, do not risk a fall by trying to do it.

An occupational therapy practitioner will:

Ensure that you can safely bend to clean up spills or show you adapted ways to do so. Recommend a bathmat that will not be a tripping hazard.

Safely increase your physical conditioning by focusing on items you enjoy (e.g., gardening or washing the car to increase strength, walking to increase endurance, carrying shopping bags to increase balance).

Recommend ways to safely continue to do the things you enjoy based on your individual skills and needs.

Need More Information?

You can find additional information on occupational therapy's role in reducing falls, making your home safer, and helping you stay active in your community through the American Occupational Therapy Association at www.aota.org.

Occupational therapy is a skilled health, rehabilitation, and educational service that helps people across the lifespan participate in the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations).

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