

# PATIENT EDUCATION

## Falls Prevention Resource Guide

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Falls are the leading cause of injuries and death among older adults. You are more likely to fall in your home than any other place. With just one wrong move, you can break a hip or wrist. Your spine or head could be injured at the same time. If you are afraid of falling, you may be less active. Your quality of life might suffer when you no longer do things you enjoy. Be aware of these risk factors:

- Age
  - High risk over age 65.
- Lack of activity
- Gender
  - Women have increased risk because they are more likely to have brittle bone disease (osteoporosis).
- Habits
  - Smoking and drinking lower bone strength.
- Nutrition
  - Diets low in calcium and vitamin D weaken bones.
- Medicine
  - Taking four or more medicines significantly increases your risk for falling.

You may not be able to change your risk factors, but here are some ways to prevent falls:

- Exercise each day.
- Talk about your medicine with your doctor.
- Have your eyes checked once a year.
- Make your home safer.
- Scan ahead while you walk.
- Get enough calcium and vitamin D.
- Ask for help when you need it.

### Emergency Response Systems

Personal emergency response systems allow you to live on your own. You are kept safe by having help at the push of a button. There are other things you can do to be safe as well:

- Move your phone to a low place, like an end table or night stand.
- Have a family member call daily to talk with you.
- Set a certain time with a neighbor or friend so you can check on each other.

### Great Rivers 2-1-1

This is an information, referral, and crisis line you can call day or night. You can also find out dates of events, where to get home service, meal sites, and helpful tips on how to stay safe.

Call 2-1-1 or (800) 362-8255 toll free in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa.  
[www.greatrivers211.org](http://www.greatrivers211.org)

### Coulee Region RSVP: Friendly Caller Program

This program has someone call you daily to check in and talk to you. It is a good idea if you live alone. You can also volunteer to call others from your home.

Contact: (608) 785-0500

### Carrier Alert Program

Sign up by placing a Carrier Alert sticker inside your mailbox. If your mail carrier sees a pile up of mail, they will contact Great Rivers 2-1-1, who will try to contact you or your family.

Call 2-1-1 or (800) 362-8255 toll free in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa.  
[www.greatrivers211.org/](http://www.greatrivers211.org/)

This guide is not all inclusive. No program or service paid to be in it. Cost, sites and times are all subject to change. Talk with your doctor before you sign up for any classes or events.

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### **HelpLink Medical Alert Services**

#### **Mayo Clinic Health System-La Crosse**

You can call day or night for help. Pushing the button will send a signal to a HelpLink operator who will help you.

Contact: (608) 392-9797, ext. 26300  
[www.mayohealthsystem.org](http://www.mayohealthsystem.org)

### **ICE your phone**

ICE stands for “In Case of Emergency”. This is an emergency contact to put in your cell phone. It will tell emergency responders who to contact if you need help.

[www.icesticker.com/index.html](http://www.icesticker.com/index.html)

## **Exercise classes**

Daily exercise can maintain or increase your strength. It can also improve your balance and help you avoid falling. Find ways to keep your body moving. Strength training improves bone density. Weight-bearing exercise reduces your risk of osteoporosis. If you are not used to exercising, ask someone to show you how to move in ways that are safe. As you improve, exercises can and should get harder. These local programs are offered specifically for you.

### **Swing into Shape**

Exercise in the comfort of your home while you watch this Gundersen Health System TV program. It airs at 8 a.m. Thursday or 6:30 a.m. Friday unless otherwise noted.

- Charter: Channel 5
- Centurylink: Channel 4
- KQEG: Channel 23
- KQEG: Channel 51 (Sparta and Tomah area)
- Tri County Communications (TCCTV) Channel 18 on Mon, Wed, Fri, 9 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Contact: (608) 775-4717  
[www.gundersenhealth.org/wellness/](http://www.gundersenhealth.org/wellness/)

### **Stepping On**

This 7-week program of balance and strength exercises will help build your confidence and reduce falls. Guest speakers also talk about eyesight, medicine, and outdoor and home safety. To find a class near you:

Contact:  
Gundersen Health System  
(608) 775-2011 or (800) 362-9567, ext. 52011  
La Crosse County Aging Unit  
(608) 785-9710

### **Adult Fitness Program, UW-La Crosse**

You can join walking or running groups or water aerobics classes. You can also swim laps in the indoor pool. UW-L has an indoor 200-meter track and a strength center with free weights, weight equipment, stationary cycles, rowing machines, treadmills, and elliptical trainers.

Contact: (608) 785-8683  
[www.uwlax.edu/sah/lehp/html/af.htm](http://www.uwlax.edu/sah/lehp/html/af.htm)

### **Holmen Village Hall**

Sign up for lunch and you can exercise before you eat. The class is from 11 to 11:30 a.m. Wednesdays.

To reserve a lunch: (608) 526-6316  
[www.getactivewisconsin.org](http://www.getactivewisconsin.org)

### **Onalaska Meal Site**

When you sign up, you get a free exercise class with your paid meal. Lunch is served at 11:30 a.m. Monday – Friday at the Onalaska Community Center. To reserve a lunch: (608) 789-7829

### **Valley View Mall-La Crosse**

Walking hours are from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Sunday. The mall is closed on some holidays. It is a good idea to call ahead of time.

Contact: (608) 781-4700

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### **La Crosse Area YMCA:**

#### **Healthways SilverSneakers Fitness Program**

The Y offers many pool, studio, and gym classes just for older adults. The programs include water exercise, Yoga Stretch®, Zumba Gold®, Cardio Circuit®, and Muscular Strength & Range of Movement®.

Contact: (608) 782-9622  
[www.laxymca.org](http://www.laxymca.org)

### **La Crosse Neighborhood Centers**

#### **Senior Fitness Classes**

You can join classes such as Senior Yoga, Tai Chi, and Water Zumba. Centers are in north and south La Crosse.

Contact: (608) 789-8298  
[www.cityoflacrosse.org/](http://www.cityoflacrosse.org/)

### **Strong Seniors – Strong Bones**

Free classes are led by La Crosse County certified fitness instructors. All classes are designed to help you strengthen muscles, improve balance, and build endurance.

Contact: (608) 785-3498  
[www.getactivewisconsin.org/lacrosse/](http://www.getactivewisconsin.org/lacrosse/)

### **Walk Strong, Walk Tall Fall Prevention Program, UWL Physical Therapy**

Practice strength and balance exercises. You can also choose other fall prevention topics you want to learn about.

Contact: (608)785-8461

### **Tai Chi, Western Technical College**

Tai chi is a Chinese exercise system which uses slow, smooth body movements. If done regularly, it improves muscle tone, flexibility, balance, and coordination. Studies show regular practice of tai chi is effective in preventing falls in seniors.

Contact: 1(800)322-9982  
[www.westerntc.edu/lifelonglearning](http://www.westerntc.edu/lifelonglearning)

## **Home medical equipment**

Correct medical equipment can make your life easier and keep you safe. There are many types such as canes, walkers, or bathroom aids. Retail stores and pharmacies often carry home medical equipment. Insurance does not always cover rental or purchase. Contact your insurance company before you start to shop.

## **Eyesight**

Sometimes as you get older, your vision gets worse. If you have poor vision, you are more likely to fall. You cannot change your eyesight, but here are things you can do to lower your risk of falling:

- Have an eye exam every year.
- Wear your glasses all the time if you need to.
- Have your glasses prescription up to date.
- Keep your glasses clean.

### **Gundersen Health Eye Clinics**

Staff at each eye clinic can check your vision or treat minor problems and injuries. More complex treatment and services are offered at the La Crosse and Onalaska eye clinics.

- La Crosse Clinic: (608) 775-2191
- Onalaska Clinic: (608) 775-8100

There are 10 regional Gundersen eye clinics in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa. To find the one closest to your home, call (800) 362-9567 or visit [www.gundersenhealth.org/vision](http://www.gundersenhealth.org/vision)

## **Medicine**

Being on four or more types of medicine will increase your risk of falling. You should know the correct dose of each medicine, why you take it, and its side effects. Writing these details on a medicine list can be helpful. (You will find one on p. X.) Here are other ways to keep yourself safe when taking medicine:

- If you have any questions, ask your doctor.
- Prepare for your doctor visits. Write down questions in advance and take them with you.

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- Take out-of-date medicine or medicine you no longer need to a local drop off event or site. To find out when a future medicine drop off date is, visit: [www.lacrossecpn.org](http://www.lacrossecpn.org)

### **Other helpful resources**

These are for you, family members, and caregivers.

#### **Telephone Nurse Advisor**

This free service is staffed by Gundersen Health System nurses 24 hours a day. They will answer your health questions and direct you to the care you need.

Contact: (608) 775-4454 or (800) 858-1050

#### **Neighbors in Action**

This service for residents of La Crescent and Hokah, Minnesota, can help you live freely in your own home. You will be matched with volunteers based on your needs and wishes. Some things they offer are friendly visits, help with chores inside and outside your home, and car rides.

Contact: (507) 895-5150

#### **Aging and Disability Resource Centers**

These provide a range of services in your area. Find your county in the list below and call that center for more details.

#### **Aging and Disability Resource Center of Western Wisconsin**

Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, or Vernon County  
Contact: (608) 785-5700 or (800) 500-3910

#### **Aging and Disability Resource Center of Southwest Wisconsin**

Crawford, Grant, Green, Iowa, Juneau, Lafayette, Richland, or Sauk County.  
Contact: (877) 794-2372

#### **Aging and Disability Resource Center of Trempealeau County**

Contact: (715) 538-2001 or (800) 273-2001

#### **Aging and Disability Resource Center of Buffalo, Clark, and Pepin Counties**

Contact: (866) 578-2372

#### **Southeast Minnesota Area Agency on Aging**

Dodge, Houston, Fillmore, Freeborn, Goodhue, Mower, Olmstead, Rice, Steele, Wabasha, or Winona County

Contact: (507) 288-6944 or (800) 333-2433

#### **Northeast Iowa Area Agency on Aging**

Allamakee, Clayton, Fayette, Howard or Winneshiek County

Contact: (563) 382-2941

### **Home safety tips**

#### **Be safe where you walk.**

- Clear clutter off the floor where you walk from room to room.
- If there are kids or pets at home, be sure toys are picked up.
- Arrange furniture to leave clear pathways.
- Pick up all small, loose rugs (scatter rugs or throw rugs).
- Trim and then tape or tack loose carpet edges.
- Use non-skid wax or no wax at all.
- Put nightlights in hallways.
- Keep all cords out of walking pathways. Never run cords under rugs.
- If you use a walker, carry items in a basket or walker bag.
- If you use a reacher, attach it to your walker with Velcro.

#### **Be safe where you sit.**

- Keep a lamp, phone, TV remote and other things you use often beside your favorite chair.
- Your chair should be firm and sturdy. It should have arms but no wheels.
- If you have had a recent hip replacement, sit only in chairs that hit the back of your knee

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### **Be safe on the stairs.**

- Each stairway needs at least one handrail.
- Use the rail(s) as you go up or down.
- Keep stairs well lit and in good repair.
- Mark the top and bottom steps with paint or tape in a color that stands out.
- Wear sturdy shoes or slippers with hard rubber soles. Do not walk in nylons, socks or cloth slippers.
- Keep clutter off steps. Put a basket near the stairs to hold small items.
- Carry the basket in your free hand and put the other on the railing.
- Plan your trips up and down. Make fewer trips.

### **Be safe in your bedroom.**

- Have a nightlight near your bed or keep a flashlight on the nightstand.
- Pick up all small, loose rugs (scatter rugs or throw rugs).
- Keep closet doors and drawers closed.
- When you get out of bed, sit for a minute to keep from getting dizzy.
- Put your phone and a lamp next to your bed.
- Make sure walking pathways are clear of clothes, slippers and blankets.
- Keep clothes you wear often within easy reach.

### **Be safe in your bathroom.**

- Clearly label all medicine.
- Never use medicine that is out of date. It belongs in a hazardous waste facility, not your toilet.
- If you pre-measure daily doses, keep them in small bottles or a pill tray with lids.
- Put a nightlight in the bathroom.
- Keep glass objects out of the bathroom.
- Never use a towel rack as a grab bar.
- Only use bathroom rugs with nonskid backing.
- Keep electrical appliances away from sink and tub.
- Use liquid soap and long-handled sponges.

Do not bend to pick up things you drop while you shower. Wait until you are out and dried off to reach for them.

### **Think about adding these safety features:**

- Grab bars by the tub and toilet (should be mounted in wall studs)
- Raised toilet seat (especially if you have had a hip replaced)
- Sturdy bench or chair in your bath or shower.
- Safety strips on the bottom and outside of your bathtub.
- Hand-held shower head

### **Be safe in your kitchen.**

- Keep all items you use from day to day within easy reach. Move things down in your cupboards or forward in drawers.
- Keep items you use often on the counter.
- All rugs should have a nonskid backing to prevent slipping.
- Never carry food, dishes or tools while you use a walker. Do these things instead:
  - Use a walker bag or basket.
  - Use a wheeled cart.
  - Slide items along the counter.
  - Use a travel mug to carry liquids.
- Sit to work.
- Unplug appliances when you are not using them.
- Do not overload circuits.

### **Be safe when you use the stove or oven.**

- Keep spray cans away from your stove or oven.
- Mark dials in red to make them easy to read.
- Wear close fitting sleeves so they cannot brush against burners.
- Use front burners whenever possible.
- Open pot lids away from you.
- Turn pot handles in toward the stove to prevent spills.
- Slide pots instead of lifting them when you can.
- Use oven mitts instead of potholders.
- Pull out oven racks instead of reaching in.
- Use proper oven ware.

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### **Be safe on the phone.**

- If you have trouble seeing, use a phone with large numbers.
- Keep a list of emergency numbers near the phone.
- Turn up the volume of the ring if you need to.

### **Be safe outdoors.**

- Attach a grab bar by the steps from the garage into the kitchen.
- Take extra care to prevent falls on garden tools, hoses and sidewalk cracks.

## **Talk with your doctor**

Take an active role in your health. You might prefer to bring a trusted family member with you for support and assistance. Talking with your doctor can help you avoid falls. Here are tips to help you get ready for a visit with your doctor:

- Bring a list of written questions you want to talk about. Include major life changes and a list of your medicines.
- Be open with your doctor.
  - Share any concerns you are having.
  - Tell your doctor about your habits.
  - Tell your doctor if you have had problems related to falls.
- Ask questions.
  - At the start of your visit, tell your doctor you have questions. Be sure you have time to talk about them.
  - Ask questions if you do not understand what your doctor is telling you.
- Take notes.
  - Write down important information so you can look at it again at home.

### **Complete this checklist before each office visit.**

Tell your doctor if any of these have happened in the last 6 months:

- A fall, or a near fall (slip or trip) or fear of falling
- Problems with walking or balance
- Muscle weakness (especially in the legs)
- Loss of feeling or numbness in your legs/feet
- Swelling in your ankles or feet
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Dizzy or lightheaded, passed out or fainted
- Changes in hearing or vision
- Changes in your sleep pattern
- Chronic conditions like diabetes, arthritis or high/low blood pressure
- Felt depressed for an extended period of time
- Problems doing daily activities at home (such as bathing or getting dressed)

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Make a detailed entry on this card for each medicine you take. Keep it up to date.

Personal Medicine List							
Name:							
Medicine	Dose (i.e. mg, ml, units, drops)	Start Date	When do you take it? (check time)				Why do you take it?
			am	noon	pm	bedtime	