

# Occupational Therapy TOOLKIT

## Don't Let a Fall Get You Down

### 1. Talk About Your Fears

The greatest risk factor for falling is a previous fall. It is important that you call your doctor if you have fallen. You need to find out why you fell and how to reduce your risk for falling again. Worry about falling or falling again may cause a person to restrict their activities. People are afraid of falling so they stop doing things. As they do less, they lose muscle strength and balance ability, making them more susceptible to falling. As a result, what they fear becomes more likely.

#### Am I at risk for a fall?

Consider the following questions.

Have you fallen in the past 6 months?

Are you afraid of falling?

Have you limited your activity because you are worried about falling?

Do you avoid exercise because you are worried about falling?

Are you concerned that you will lose your balance while...

Reaching on tiptoes

Reaching to low shelves

Picking something up off the floor

Sweeping the floor

Getting dressed

Taking a shower

Carrying items

Walking long distances

Walking outside

Walking in crowds

Going up and down the stairs

Getting in and out of a car

#### What can I do to reduce my risk?

Read this booklet and follow the suggestions. Learn what to do if you fall.

Talk with your doctor about your fears.

Consider obtaining a medical-alert system.

Consider whether you need hip protectors.

Realize that there is a trade off between the risk of immobility and the risk of mobility, and then find the right balance for you.

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### 2. Create a Safe Home

Home sweet home - or is it? Your home could put you at risk for a fall. Did you know one-third of all falls involve hazards in the home? The most common hazard for falls is tripping over objects on the floor. Other factors include poor lighting, loose rugs, lack of grab bars and unsteady furniture.

Conduct a walk-through of your home to identify possible problems that may lead to slips, trips or fall.

#### **Floors:**

Clear your pathways. Make sure there are no objects like pillows, blankets or books in your path. Don't leave magazines or other objects such as your shoes on the floor where you may trip on them.

Create color contrasts between your walls and floors. Lighter colored floors are easier to see and it is easier to see objects that may have fallen in your path.

Remove throw rugs, or secure them with double-sided carpet tape. Avoid placing area rugs and throw rugs on top of the carpeting.

Keep all cords out of the way, including electric, telephone and TV cords. Never put cords under carpeting or across areas where you walk.

Wipe up spills as soon as possible.

#### **Living Areas:**

Arrange chairs, couches, and other furniture so you can move around them easily.

Footstools and ottomans can cause falls. When you are not using them, move them out of your path.

Select chairs that are easy for you to get in and out of. Avoid chairs that swivel, rock or have wheels.

Always put footrests for recliners into the closed position before getting up.

If seating is too low, increase the height by adding extra cushions.

Place a phone next to your living room chair or carry a cordless one so you don't have to rush to answer it.

Make sure your home is well lit and that you can safely access lamps and light switches.

Always turn on the lights before going into a room.

Use non-glare bulbs that are 100 watts or greater. Replace burned-out bulbs.

Use night-lights in the hallways and bathroom.

### **Bedroom:**

Place a phone next to your bed.

Make sure the bed doesn't move and that it is high enough for you to get into and out of easily.

Blankets and bedspreads should be tucked in at the corners to prevent tripping.

Have a firm chair with arms in the bedroom for dressing.

### **Bathroom**

Place non-slip, low pile mats in front of the sink and on the floor where you exit the tub.



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### 3. Look After Your Health

The natural aging process and the effects of acute and chronic medical conditions may put you at a higher risk for a fall.

Osteoporosis causes bones to become fragile and fracture more easily.

Low blood pressure or a heart conditions can cause dizziness.

Parkinson's, arthritis or having had a stroke can affect your ability to move easily and can slow reaction time.

Diabetes can cause fainting if your blood sugar levels are unstable.

Memory loss, depression or impaired concentration may lower your awareness and attention to fall hazards.

A short-term illnesses with fever, vomiting or diarrhea can temporarily increase your risk of falling.

#### **What can I do to reduce my risk?**

Have regular check-ups with your doctor to ensure your medical conditions are well managed.

Keep active. Eat a well-balanced diet, eat regularly and drink plenty of water.

Ask your doctor if you should have a bone scan for osteoporosis. Osteoporosis effects men as well a women. If you have osteoporosis, talk to your doctor about getting enough Vitamin D and calcium.

Whenever you have been lying or sitting for more than 20 minutes, sit on the side of the bed or upright in your chair for a few minutes before you stand up. Pump your ankles and hands 10 times. Stand, pause for the count of 10 and take one slow deep breath before you take a step.

If you experience a fever, vomiting or diarrhea, see your doctor. Drink fluids. Arrange for in-home nursing aides to help if you're unsteady, weak or fatigued.

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### 4. Get Physically Active

Being physically active can help prevent falls. Being inactive creates a vicious cycle. Muscles weaken, joints stiffen, and balance declines. Walking becomes unsteady and you are more likely to fall. Regular physical activity that builds muscle strength and balance can help prevent falls. Physical activity also improves flexibility, decreases pain, improves heart health and increases your balance confidence.

#### What can I do to reduce my risk?

Talk with your doctor before beginning any new physical activity or exercise program.

Participate in some form of physical activity for at least 20 minutes, three times a week.

Take a walk around your neighborhood. Join a Tai Chi, balance or swim class.

If recommended, use your walker or cane and keep it properly maintained.

If you use a walking aid or think you need one, consult a physical therapist to ensure proper fit and for instruction on safe use.

Carrying extra weight can make it more difficult to overcome minor imbalances and that can lead to a fall.

If you've been inactive for a while or have weak muscles or stiff joints, talk to your doctor about a referral for physical therapy.

If you have difficulty keeping your balance or shuffle when you walk, talk to your doctor about a referral for physical therapy.

If you have difficulty with getting off the toilet or in and out of the tub, talk to your doctor about a referral for occupational therapy.

If you have trouble getting dressed, bathing yourself, making your bed or preparing something to eat, talk to your doctor about a referral for occupational therapy.



growiness or unsteadiness. Simple taking four or more medications can increase your risk of falling. The more medications you take the greater the chance of drug interactions.

### **What can I do to reduce my risk?**

Review your medications with your doctor at least every six months.

Keep an updated list of your medications in your wallet or purse and on the refrigerator.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist before taking any over-the-counter medications or herbal remedies.

Learn about your medications, their side effects, possible drug interactions and why you are taking them.

Some medications are considered high-risk and include, psychotropics, cardiovascular, diuretics, anti-depressants, anti-anxiety and hypnotics. Ask you doctor if you are taking any of these.

If any side effects are troubling you, or if you think your medicine is not helping, talk to your doctor.

Use the same pharmacy for all your medications.

Take your medications as instructed.

Do not stop any medication without talking to your doctor.

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### 6. Take Care of Your Eyes

Vision is one of our most important senses. As we age, our eyes can become more sensitive to light and glare. Our ability to focus diminishes and we have more problems with subtle contrasts and with depth perception. Eye diseases such as glaucoma, macular degeneration, cataracts and diabetic retinopathy can cause severe vision loss and certain medications can also affect your vision.

#### **What can I do to reduce my risk?**

Have your eyesight checked by an eye doctor at least once a year. Earlier if you notice changes in your eyesight.

If you wear reading glasses, remove them before walking.

Clean your glasses regularly, using a non- glare cleaner and soft cloth.

Wear sunglasses when out in the sun. Remember to remove them when coming inside.

Pause and give your eyes time to adapt to changes in light.

Reduce glare by pulling your curtains closed.

Use good lighting and color contrast in your home.

Use night-lights.

When carrying packages, don't block your view. Keep one hand free to help your balance.

Review the Create a Safe Home section on page 4.

#### **Where can I get help or advice?**

Make an appointment with an eye doctor.

If your vision is making it difficult to perform your daily activities, talk to your doctor about a referral for occupational therapy.

Join a low vision support group.