

## Preventing Falls

### Step 1: Know Your Medications

- Name (brand and generic)
- Side effects
- Dose (strength)
- Reason you are taking them
- When to take them (before or after meals, in the morning or night)



Pill boxes and alarms are helpful for reminding you when to take your medication.

### Step 2: Know the Effects

- Know which of your medications can increase your risk for a fall.
- Keep a journal to record any symptoms or side effects you experience and bring it to all of your appointments.

### Step 3: Know Who to Ask

- Get all the facts by asking your doctor or pharmacist about your medications and their side effects.
- Participate in “brown bag events” to get your medications reviewed and ask any questions you have regarding your medications and falls.
- Have your doctor and pharmacist work together to find the best medication plan for you.

## Be Proactive!

- **Blood Pressure:** Discuss your target range with your doctor and know how to perform self screenings at home. Have an action plan in place if your blood pressure is out of range.
- **Blood Sugar:** Develop an action plan with your doctor that you can follow if your blood sugar drops too low. This simple step can help avoid dangerous complications.
- **Be Informed:** Take advantage of free health screenings, which help identify risks before they become a problem.
- **Be Active:** Participate in an exercise program to improve strength, flexibility, and balance. Contact the county Office on Aging regarding classes, particularly the evidenced-based Matter of Balance program where available.
- **Be Prepared:** Educate yourself how vision, exercise, home safety, foot care, and nutrition can effect falls.

# Standing Tall Against Falls



## The ABC's of Medications and Falls

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Mary O'Dowd, MPH  
Commissioner

## Know the Factors That Put You At Risk for Falls:

**Some medications increase your risk of falling and suffering serious injury or even death. Knowing these side effects and taking steps to prevent them are important ways to safeguard your health.**

### Altered Vision

Some medications can alter your vision. Altered vision includes blurry or double vision, a decrease in clarity, diminished vision at night and decreased depth perception. These changes can cause you to become less aware of your surroundings. Other reasons for altered vision include:

- **Eye conditions**, such as glaucoma, cataracts, and age-related macular degeneration
- **Diabetes**, such as *diabetic retinopathy*, which results in a progressive loss of vision
- **Stroke**

### Balance

Some medications can make you feel unsteady. The most common agents that can affect your balance are *Blood Pressure Medications* which include:

- Diuretics (Water Pills)
- Beta blockers
- ACE inhibitors
- Nitrates



These medications are intended to lower your blood pressure, but if your blood pressure is too low, you can feel dizzy, lightheaded when changing positions, and unsteady when walking. This can cause your balance to falter and increase your risk of falling.

Other medications that can lead to a loss of coordination and balance are:

- Anti-arrhythmics (irregular heartbeat medications)
- Over-the-counter pain medications (such as ibuprofen and naproxen)

### Confusion

Confusion is a loss of orientation, focus, or difficulty concentrating on your surroundings. It may be difficult to notice the onset of confusion and it may be a side effect of your medication. Examples include:

- Heartburn or upset stomach medications
- Anti-depressant medications
- Benzodiazepines (anti-anxiety medications)
- Parkinson's Disease medications



### Drowsiness

Being drowsy is often accompanied by a lack of concentration and decreased focus on your surroundings.

Many over-the-counter cough and cold or allergy products contain antihistamines that can cause drowsiness.

Other drug classes that can cause drowsiness include:

- Benzodiazepines (anti-anxiety medications)
- Prescription pain medications
- Antidepressants
- Anti-epileptics (anti-seizure medications)



### Caution

#### Alcohol Increases Your Risk For Falls!

**Alcohol alone can cause all of the risk factors discussed in this pamphlet. Combining alcohol with medications however, can complicate and worsen their side effects. This increases your risk for a fall. Tell your doctor or pharmacist when starting a new medication about your alcohol use. Use alcohol with caution.**

### Warning!

**If you feel disoriented, confused, or are experiencing an increase in falls, make sure to contact your pharmacist or doctor.**