

# Preventing Falls: In the Hospital



At some point, you or your loved one may need care in a hospital or other facility. People may ask how well you can move around. Answer this question honestly. Staff will complete a fall risk assessment that will include questions about things that increase your risk of falling. If you have a high risk of falling, the staff will take extra steps to help keep you safe. You may be given a wristband to wear that alerts staff that you are at risk for falls. Remember, always ask for help when you need it. Here is information on falls and some safety tips.

## Why falls may happen

- You may feel dizzy or drowsy from the medicines you take. This may lead to a fall. Common medicines that cause these side effects include medicines for blood pressure, heart disease, pain, sleep, and depression.
- You may feel weak or unsteady on your feet from a recent surgery, procedure, or treatment.
- You may feel lightheaded, dizzy, or weak from an illness or going without food or rest.
- You may not be familiar with your surroundings when you wake up.

## Things that increase risk of falling

- A previous fall or recent history of a fall
- Older age
- Female gender
- Certain medicines, change in medicines, or change in dose or how often you take the medicines
- Physical disability
- Lower body weakness
- Difficulty with walking or balance
- Use of walking aids such as a walker, cane, or crutches
- Need to use the toilet often or incontinence
- Visual or hearing problems
- Thinking problems
- Long-lasting (chronic) health conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, or heart disease
- Sudden drop in blood pressure when you stand up (orthostatic hypotension)
- Depression
- Environment with fall hazards. This may include certain patient care devices such as an IV (intravenous) line, IV pole, or bladder catheter.

## Keep things in reach

- Keep the things you use often in easy reach. This includes call button, eyeglasses, hearing aids, phone, purse, wallet, books, tissues, water, remote control, and light cord.
- With the nurse present, practice using the call button before you really need it. Keep it in reach. And don't be afraid to use it when you need to!
- Know how to turn the light on and off from your bed. Also know how to use the bed control.



## Get help to move around

- Don't get up on your own, even to use the bathroom. Call someone for help. Depending on how ill you are, your hospital may have a staff member sit with you, help you walk, and be by your side at all times. This trained staff member is often known as a patient safety attendant. Some hospitals may have a trained patient safety attendant monitoring you from another location via video. Check with your hospital to learn more.
- Sit up slowly and with help.
- When getting out of bed, sit on the side of the bed before standing. Stand slowly. Some medicines or conditions can make you dizzy when you change positions.
- Wear nonskid, well-fitting footwear when walking.
- Don't try to move IV poles or other equipment on your own.
- Use your walking aid as instructed by the staff. Use handrails in bathrooms or in hallways.
- Wear a gait belt. The staff may use a gait belt to keep you safe as you move around. This fits snugly around your waist. It allows another person to support you as you walk together.

You may have an alarm set on your bed or chair at the hospital. The alarm will alert staff when you attempt to get up without their help. This is to help prevent falls if you forget or choose not to use your call button or ask for help before getting up.

Depending on your risk for falls, a staff member may need to be within arm's reach of you to help prevent a fall. This may include when you are walking, using the bathroom, or doing an activity out of your bed or chair.

## Tips for visitors and family

When someone is ill or in the hospital, falling is more likely. You can help your loved one reduce the risk:

- Keep personal items in the same place. Stick with a routine.
- Learn about the guidelines the staff has in place to prevent falls. Follow them.

- Get guidance on using safety equipment and moving your loved one.
- When directing your loved one, keep it simple. Go one step at a time.
- Tell staff about any mental or physical changes you notice in your loved one.

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