

# The Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities of Southwest Washington’s Caregiver Corner

## Fall falls with knowledge and care

Most of us know someone who has experienced a fall, or we have fallen ourselves. Falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries for older adults. They don’t need to be, though. Practical lifestyle adjustments, evidence-based falls prevention programs and clinical-community partnerships can substantially reduce the likelihood of falling.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other research:

- Fourteen million, or 1 in 4, Americans ages 65 and older fall each year.
- In 2021, falls were responsible for 38,000 deaths among those ages 65 and over, and emergency departments reported 3 million visits by older adults as a result of falls.
- The cost of treating injuries caused by falls among older adults is projected to increase to over \$101 billion by 2030.
- Among older adults who fall, over half receive care in a hospital; the estimated annual average cost per inpatient visit for falls injuries is \$18,658 and \$1,112 per emergency department visit.
- Based on data from 2020, the total health care cost of nonfatal older adult falls is \$80 billion per year, up from \$50 billion in 2015. Sixty-seven percent of fall-related costs are paid for by Medicare, 4% by Medicaid, and 29% are paid privately/out-of-pocket by older adults and families.

**Speak up!**  
Talk openly with your health care provider about fall risks and prevention.

- Tell your provider right away if you have fallen, are worried about falling or feel unsteady.
- Keep an updated list of medications. Show all of them to your provider or pharmacist, including over-the-counter medications and supplements. Discuss any side effects, such as feeling dizzy or sleepy.
- Discuss alcohol and other substance use.
- Ask about taking vitamin D or calcium supplements to improve bone, muscle and nerve health.

**Keep moving**  
Physical activities that improve balance and strengthen legs (like tai chi) can help prevent falls.

- Exercise and movement can also help you feel better and more confident.
- Check with your health care provider about the best type of exercise program for them.

**Get a checkup**  
It might seem obvious, but being able to see, hear and walk comfortably can help prevent falls.

- People with vision loss have almost twice the risk of falls as adults without vision impairment.
- People with hearing loss are nearly three times as likely to fall than those with normal hearing, but

wearing a hearing aid reduces the risk of falling by 50%.

- Lower body weakness and difficulties with walking and balance increase the risk for falls.

**Focus on home safety**  
Most falls happen at home, but there are ways to avert them.

- Keep the floors clutter-free.
- Remove small throw rugs or use double-sided tape to keep rugs from slipping.
- Add grab bars to the bathroom — next to and inside the tub or shower, and next to the toilet.
- Have handrails and lights installed on all staircases.
- Make sure your home has plenty of light.

**Take advantage of resources**  
Take the Falls Free Checkup at <https://www.ncoa.org/tools/falls-free-checkup/> to check your risk of falling, and talk with a health care provider about how to reduce it

The CDC has an evidence-based program to help prevent falls called Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths and Injuries for caregivers and health care professionals. Learn more about STEADI at <https://www.cdc.gov/steady/index.html>.

For assistance and information on classes or resources for fall prevention, call the Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities of Southwest Washington’s Aging and Disability Resource Center at 360-694-8144 or email [ClarkADRC@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:ClarkADRC@dshs.wa.gov).

AAADSW also offers Enhance Fitness classes for older adults (60-plus) at several locations throughout Clark County. These evidence-based classes can be adapted to your mobility (from seated to standing) and are a free and fun way to



improve your overall balance and fitness. To learn more, visit <https://www.helpingelders.org/education> or call the ADRC at 360-694-8144 or email [ClarkADRC@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:ClarkADRC@dshs.wa.gov).

*Patti Atkins, APR, is the communications coordinator for the Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities of Southwest Washington.*

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