

# Use it

(or lose it)

## Maintain your mobility

Our mobility tends to decline as we age. This decline may be due to chronic diseases or a general loss of muscle strength and flexibility from lack of physical activity. However, mobility problems don't just affect the elderly. About 10 percent (19 million) adults in the U.S. have mobility limitations. The most common culprits: arthritis and back problems.

Some of our greatest fears are tied to our loss of independence due to the inability to remain active because of conditions that often accompany aging. Mobility problems can cause depression, anxiety and other problems. You can't stop the aging process, of course. However, you can definitely take steps to preserve your mobility—at any age.

**Know your risk of falling.** Ask your doctor to evaluate your risk of falling. Ninety-five percent of hip fractures are caused by falling (usually from falling sideways), and falls are the most common cause of traumatic brain injury. Every year, about one out of four adults 65 and older falls, and about 20 percent of those falls result in serious injury.

## Risk Factors for Falls

- Lower-body weakness
- Vitamin D deficiency
- Difficulty walking or with balance
- Medications
- Vision problems
- Foot pain/poor footwear
- Home safety hazards
- Osteoporosis



A complete physical exam can help your physician determine if you have a medical condition, such as osteoporosis, that requires medical treatment. Although everyone loses bone mass as we age, people with osteoporosis lose too much, making their bones brittle and more likely to break. A bone mineral density test screens for osteoporosis. If you are a woman 65 and older, are a man 70 and older, or have a history of falls or fractures, talk to your doctor about bone mineral density testing.

Your healthcare provider can also evaluate your gait for problems that may throw off your balance. Furthermore, some medications, such as those for blood pressure or heart disease, can make you susceptible to falls. If you're at risk of falling, your doctor may recommend a lower dose or switching to a different medicine.

## Simple Exercises to Improve Balance

- Stand on one leg at a time for 1 minute and slowly increase the time. Try to balance with your eyes closed or without holding on.
- Stand on your toes for a count of 10. Then, rock back on your heels for a count of 10.
- Make a circle to the left, then the right, with your hip. Repeat 5 times without moving your feet or shoulders.



**Get an eye exam.** Poor vision can lead you to trip or misstep and fall, particularly in poor lighting. See your eye doctor for a comprehensive exam, and wear corrective lenses if needed.

**Make your home safe.** Most falls occur at home and are preventable. Look for trip hazards, such as loose carpets or obstructions in walkways. Increase the lighting so you can see. Add grab bars in the bathroom to help you safely navigate the tub and toilet. Add a second railing to your staircase. Wear shoes instead of socks in your house. Shoes with rubber soles will give you good grip.

**Use an assistive device.** Canes, walking sticks and walkers can also help you stay stable while being mobile and can help prevent falls. Each serves a slightly different purpose. For best results (and to prevent misuse), have your physician or a physical therapist fit you properly and teach you how to use your device.

## ACTION ITEMS

**Move.** While it may seem contradictory, the more active you are, the less likely you are to develop a major mobility disability. Physical activity builds strong bones and muscles. It also increases your endurance, and specific activities (such as standing on one leg) can improve your balance and reduce your risk of falling.