

## Staying Independent and Safe in your Home

A fall is the leading cause of loss of independent living, and while those over the age of 65 are at highest risk. Falls begin as early as age 45 with the loss of balance and muscle and so early efforts can make one safer at any age. The following information will provide you with guidance and practical information to assess and make changes that will allow you to prevent a fall and live independently longer.

### **What is your at risk?**

#### Questions to ask yourself:

- Are you unsteady on your feet when you stand up or walk around?
- Do you need to use the arms of a chair to get up from a seated position?
- Have you fallen in the past year ?
- Are you afraid of falling?
- Are you 65 and older? Or even age 50 and over?
- Are you on a blood thinner or mood altering medication?
- Do you have hearing or vision loss?
- Do you have Diabetes , Parkinson's or similar problem affecting stability, vision, or movement?

If you answered yes to any of these, you are at either higher risk of falling or having a severe outcome if you do fall- that you can work to prevent now!



## Do you Walk the Walk Correctly?

Many people believe the majority of falls occur on stairs or even in bathrooms. But most falls occur on the same level from walking through the home with a shuffle walk. Shuffle walking can occur for a variety of reasons such as weak hip, leg, or foot muscles, fear of falling, using poor fitting slippers, to decreased vision and lighting, pain, or simply taking a more laid back approach to getting around the home.

Shuffling is a common cause of falls because sliding feet can more easily trip on rugs, door thresholds, or even slightly uneven surfaces. People who don't lift their feet when they walk are more likely to stumble because their shoes/feet can catch on the ground. Plus, the narrow stance of shuffling feet makes someone more unbalanced and therefore more likely to fall. Some of the tips below for exercise and home changes will help with shuffle walking as well as other falls risks.!

- 1) Begin an exercise program specific to strength and balance movements.
- 2) Check your home for lighting and clear pathways.
- 3) Make sure a stable surface is near the bed and sofa to help you get up and down.
- 4) Use a cane or walker if advised – their purpose is to help you walk with a normal gait.
- 5) Use snug shoes when walking around the home and not loose slippers.

## What are you afraid of?

Fear of falling makes one adjust their life activities. This usually results in a greater falls risk by not only changing the way one walks, but by reducing activity levels which makes the loss of strength and balance happen more quickly. There are ways to reduce your risk of falling by assessing individual risks and making modifications so that the real threat of falling is reduced.

Think about situations in which you are afraid of falling- or there is a risk of falling while doing and how you can reduce that risk. Take the below steps in each situation.

**Step one-** Assess riskier situations

**Step two-** Can the risk be reduced or eliminated?

**Step three-** Make the change or ask for help making the changes.

*Example:*

**Risk-** using upper kitchen cabinets to store dishes or spices causes one to need a step stool.

**Solution-** move those items to a lower cabinet or even the countertop

**Question-** do I need someone to help me move those items – if yes- ASK.

Other example questions:

- Do I need help getting in a friend's home to visit- due to stairs or slippery conditions?
- Do I need to put my pet in a room when I am up and about cleaning or cooking dinner?
- Do I need an answering machine to allow more time for me to get to the phone safely?

- Do I need to use water only to clean floors as bending and picking up sticky cleaner is difficult?
- Do I need to take more trips from my car into the home with packages?
- Do you need to have a fenced back yard for your dogs instead of a daily walk- if they are excitable darters, making walking a risk.
- Do I need to arrive at locations earlier to avoid dark conditions on roads or in buildings?

There will not be a standard set of questions, all vary based on your situation but thinking ahead and making adjustments and asking for help will help keep you safer so you don't have to be as afraid of falling.

## **Can you move in your home safely?**

There are a few things you can easily do in your home to make it safer to walk about while reducing your fall risk. For those of higher risk, families might consider other more extensive changes.

### Bedroom Organization Tips

- Clear a path to the door
- Have the bed near the bathroom
- Keep a phone near your bed
- Have lighting near your bed and near the entrance and exits to the room for night time
- Consider a stable stand near the bed to assist in getting up and down
- Consider a bed that is lower to the ground and/or an incline pillow to make transitions easier

### Bathroom Organization Tips

- Have a bathmat that is stable under the sink and at the shower door that is water absorbent
- Have a bathtub mat inside the tub that is non-slip
- Have grab bars and safety rails installed inside the shower (If you use bars with suction cups, make sure to test them every time you use them to make sure they are secure)
- Have a shower caddy that is secure to hold your items in place
- Do not reach for a towel rack for support, if you find yourself doing this install a grab bar in place of the towel rack

### Kitchen Organization Tips

- Use a kitchen mat that is water absorbent at your sink
- Keep appliance cords tucked away in a safe place
- Keep your items on the lower shelves – don't use a step stool
- Have lever style handles so the cabinets are easier to open

## Hallway and Furniture Organization Tips

- Hallways need to be clear, to avoid items to trip on or over- and to have a solid wall to use for support if needed. – Use a night light if needed to light walkways between rooms.
- Move the furniture to where there are clear paths, if you find yourself bumping into furniture you should move it
- Keep the stairs clear, install colored tape on the step edges, and install bars if needed to go up and down
- Remove any area rugs -because area rugs can slip from underneath you or bunch up and trip you. If you need to keep rugs, consider double sided rug tape to make sure the rug is secure to the ground around the edges especially

## **Great Job! A few other notes about preventing falls.**

- Be extra careful when starting a new medication or changing dosing to allow your body time to adjust
- Consider using more stable shoes than loose slippers when walking around the home
- If you use multiple medications or medications that cause dizziness, consider making a list and going to your local pharmacy for a free medicine reconciliation session to pinpoint risks to discuss with your doctor.

## **Get Down to work!**

There are two very important sets of activities you can begin to reduce your risk of falls!

### **Executive Function exercises**

Increasing executive functions have been shown to reduce falls risk and can be fun. A few examples are below

- Crossword puzzles, card games, jigsaw puzzles, finding differences image puzzles.
- Nordic walking- combining upper and lower coordination
- Writing down words and numbers, using a short amount of time to memorize them and then trying and recall them with paper and pen.

### **Balance and Strength are the key to Standing?**

Lastly but most importantly, balance, strength, and flexibility exercises are the key to helping you move independently longer without a fall. And they can even be the key to living with less pain or being able to drive safer on the road. As age happens, movement keeps muscles and joints doing their jobs to bend, catch, and hold one up- when a trip occurs.

Below we have suggested a few key exercises but there are plenty more and adaptations that can be made to specific situations so feel free to request a physical therapy appointment if you need additional guidance.

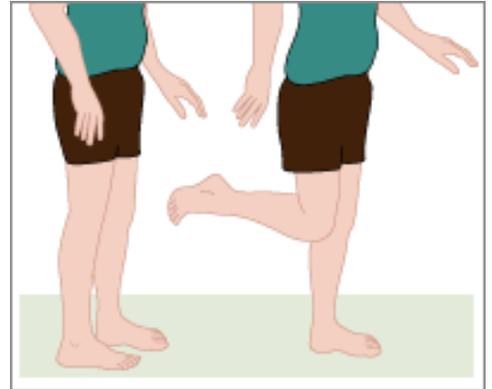
If you are unsure about exercising, check with your physician first or if you feel pain while exercising stop and consult your doctor.

- Do the following exercises on each arm/leg 10-15 times and work up to three times for each exercise 3-5 times a week.
- Remember to Breathe, drink water, and rest as needed.
- For these exercises doing them right is the key to their helpfulness. So using full range of motion and doing them slower to build strength is what is important.
- Use a table, chair pushed against a wall or other stable surface to help with balance if needed, it is okay!

***Lets get started!!***

### **Flamingo Stand**

1. Stand with feet together and arm relaxed at sides. Hold onto a chair for support if needed.
2. Bend one knee to lift the foot slightly off the ground and balance with your other leg.

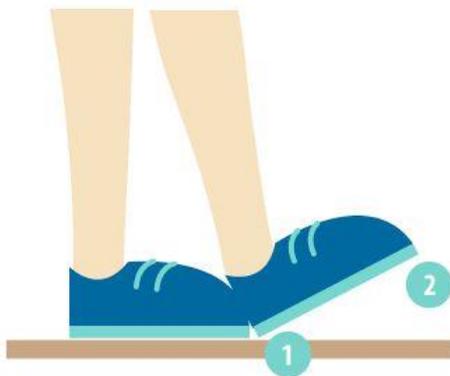


### **Single Limb Stance with Arm**

1. Stand with feet together and arm relaxed at sides.
2. Raise your arm overhead and raise the same side leg forward and off the floor.



### **Toe the line**



1. Stand with arms relaxed at sides.
2. Move one foot forward, placing the heel of one foot touching or as close as possible to the toes of your other foot. Hold for 5-10 seconds

### **Seated Knee Extensions**

1. Begin seated in a chair with your back straight and **knees bent**.
2. Slowly extend one of your legs from the knee forward and hold for a few seconds before lowering back to starting position.



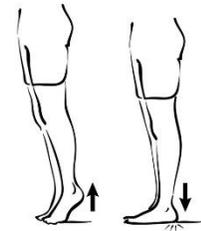
**Seated Chair Raise**

1. Sit on chair ( scoot to edge if needed)
2. Use leg muscles to lift slightly up from chair
3. As needed use arms to steady and return to sitting



**Calve Raises- Use a chair or something sturdy as needed**

1. Place feet and shoulder about shoulder width apart
2. Lift up heels- Pause 3-5 seconds – return heels to floor

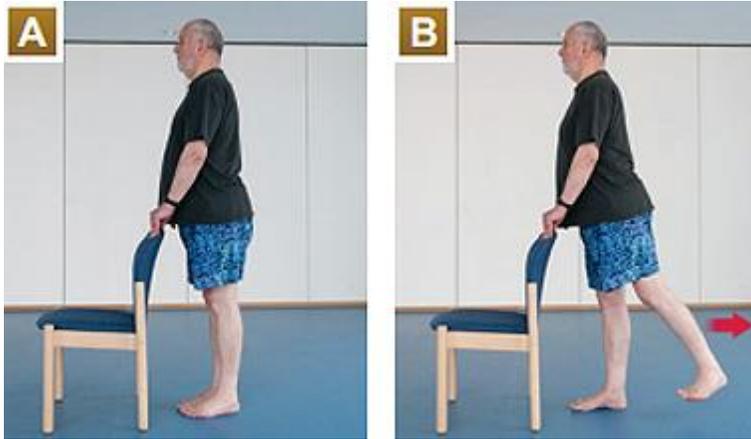
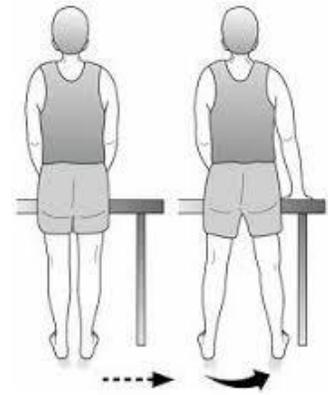


**March in place- Seated ( move up to standing if can/when can)**

1. Start marching. Alternating steps: slow to a moderate pace lifting knees high as can and using foot from heel to toe.

### ***Step side to side (alternating)***

1. Step right foot to right foot and left foot to left foot starting while toe and moving foot through heel to get most range of motion.



### ***Hip extension***

1. Slide foot back from heel to toe with leg back and toe pointed.
2. Return to start

### ***Hip Circles***

1. Place hands on hip and rotate outward in a full circle back to start.



### ***Seated or Standing Ankle Circles***

1. lift your foot and start at one point and Circle your foot all the way in a circle slowly.





### ***Calf Stretch***

1. Lean against a wall or just use a chair, put one foot back , make sure whole foot is on ground and feel stretch in calf.

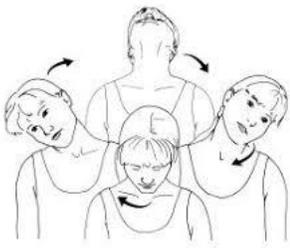
### ***Arm Circles***

1. Slowly rotate arms around to stretch upper body



### ***Head circles***

1. Slowly circle your head from in a circle gently stretching neck muscles.



Last note, other conditions like Parkinson's or Diabetes or things such as poor vision or hearing can also affect falls risk but requires a specialist to assist in specific modifications so please ask your provider for assistance with those risks.

### **NOTES:**

Following all information in this booklet does not guarantee an injury will not occur and a physician should be consulted for additional guidance, individual concerns or medical concerns related to any of the information. The information is current as of 2020 and is compiled from national resources in one booklet by Carolinas Center for Injury Prevention as a starting point of guidance to help older adults reduce injuries and live independently longer.

