

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

Five Tips for Preventing Falls

Children fall. Teenagers fall. Middle-aged people fall. But, according to many experts, no age group suffers the consequences of a fall more than the elderly.

Approximately one third of those over the age of 65, according to the American Geriatrics Society, falls each year; with half of the accidents happening to those over the age of 75. Many of these tumbles result in serious injuries such as hip fracture, which is associated with an elevated risk of premature death.



What's so frustrating about fall-related injuries, according to Dr. Gravesen, is that almost all of them are preventable. And that's the good news. By taking a proactive stance, and following the tips outlined below, you can stay in charge of your life and reduce your chances of having a fall dictate your future.

1. Get A Chiropractic Checkup

Feeling more wobbly than a weeble? Maybe it's time for a chiropractic checkup. Falls often result from balance problems, some of which are due to postural discrepancies. For example, a spine that's out of alignment can shift the entire body's

center of gravity — upping the risk of stumbles.

How does chiropractic prevent falls? Regular chiropractic care eliminates a spinal condition called **vertebral subluxation**. These dysfunctional areas in the spine occur when movement is restricted or bones (vertebrae) are out of alignment. Not surprisingly, vertebral subluxations are closely linked to postural problems, including those that trigger tumbles.

Dr. Gravesen corrects vertebral subluxations with gentle and effective maneuvers called **chiropractic adjustments**. Research indicates that chiropractic adjustments promote optimal posture and spinal health — as well as ward off conditions like back pain, headache and carpal tunnel syndrome.

Research also indicates that chiropractic adjustments effectively ward off some forms of vertigo, a condition that frequently results in falling (*HNO 2000; 48:295-301*).

2. Engage in Exercise

In addition to helping you achieve a posture-perfect spine, Dr. Gravesen keeps falls at bay by encouraging regular exercise. Because muscle

weakness is associated with a heightened likelihood of falls, many chiropractors suggest weight-training regimes. Specific exercises — balancing on one foot or teetering on a “balance board” — work to improve stability. Exercise also reduces high blood pressure, helps fight heart disease and assists in combating some forms of cancer: conditions which can include dizziness as a symptom. As the incidences of dizziness decline so do the chances of falling.



Is Medication Increasing Your Risk of Falling?

A phenomenal number of medications — including over-the-counter formulations — cause dizziness, boosting the risk of falls. It is vitally important to tell your chiropractor about *all* of the medications you take.

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3. Stamp Out Slick Surfaces

Slick floor surfaces are to blame for a large percentage of falls. Scour your home and yard for potential slip-inducing surfaces. When you've identified any dangers, take precautions to eliminate them. Here are a few helpful suggestions:

- ★ Install runners (rubber or carpet) on stairs.
- ★ Add additional lighting to stairways, if needed.
- ★ Place area rugs on slick floors (especially kitchen and bathroom tile). If the rugs do not have rubber backing, consider using adhesive strips especially designed for this purpose.
- ★ Adhere slip-preventive adhesive strips in bathtubs and showers.
- ★ Keep outdoor steps, sidewalks and walkways shoveled during snow season.
- ★ Avert sprinkler streams from sidewalks and walkways.
- ★ During cold months, check walkways, sidewalks and driveways for ice before venturing outside.
- ★ Turn on the lights when moving from room to room at night: particularly on the way from the bedroom to the bathroom.
- ★ Keep floors free of clutter, toys and clothing.
- ★ Nail down loose sections of carpeting. If your carpeting has separated from the backing — leaving “rolls” that could be tripped over — consider replacing the carpet.



4. Get Support!

Studies show that added support, while walking, averts stumbles. If you're feeling unsteady, consider the following:

- ★ Invest in quality shoes with wide soles to maintain balance.
- ★ Install railing in bathrooms, stairwells and other well-traveled areas.
- ★ Arrange sturdy furniture close enough together to provide supportive surfaces throughout the home.
- ★ Use a cane in your non-dominant hand.

5. Dodge Diabetes

Are you at high risk of diabetes? If so, you're also more likely to experience falls. In a series of studies begun in the early 1990s, James Richardson, MD, and colleagues at the University of Michigan Health System, demonstrated a strong link between falling and a neurological disorder associated with diabetes called peripheral neuropathy (PN).

PN, which affects approximately 20 percent of older Americans, inhibits sensation in the feet and legs — shifting patients' center of gravity and prompting falls. For instance, patients with PN can stand on one foot without teetering for 3.8 seconds, compared with 32.3 seconds in people without PN. In addition, PN involves a gradual deterioration of muscular strength, which makes it difficult for patients to recover from stumbles. In Richardson's studies, more than half of the subjects with PN suffered a tumble, compared with only 10 percent of subjects without PN.

You can prevent diabetes by restricting foods with refined sugars, white flour and processed grains. Because obesity increases the risk of diabetes, it's also important to restrict overall caloric intake. In addition, regular exercise helps to ward off the

disease. If you suspect you may be diabetic (particularly if you have a family-history of diabetes), ask the doctor or other health-care professional about blood-sugar testing.



Look to Your Chiropractor for Winning Injury Prevention Strategies

Doctors of chiropractic don't just help patients overcome injury, they work to **prevent** painful conditions altogether. Falls are just one of many often overlooked — yet extremely common — dangers.

Your doctor of chiropractic can help you identify what injuries you're at risk of enduring, before the onset of pain. Make your health a priority by scheduling an appointment for a chiropractic checkup today.

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