# What You Need to Know About Avoiding Falls

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## Strategies to Avoid Falls When You Have Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a condition in which bone density is decreased, causing the bones to become weak and much more likely to fracture. This is why you want to avoid falls. These fractures are serious and take longer to heal compared with those occurring in individuals with healthy bones.

As aging occurs, the frequency of falls in the elderly tends to increase. This can be quite a scary prospect, especially for those with osteoporosis or related conditions.

The medication used to treat osteoporosis could also lead to disorientation and result in more falls occurring. Among adults over 65 years of age, falls are among the single largest reasons for injury.

### Quick Facts

- Most fractures will occur in the bones of the hip, spine and wrist.
- Over 1.5 million fractures are diagnosed each and every year in individuals with osteoporosis.
- Bone loss begins after the age of 25 and can happen to anyone, although osteoporosis is more commonly found in women age 50 or older.
- Osteoporosis often goes undiagnosed, and many falls and subsequent fractures are the first signs of this condition.
- More than 90% of hip fractures are associated with osteoporosis.
- 9 out of 10 *older* adults in the U.S. have broken their hip due to a fall, and most falls involve women, at home, in the afternoon.
- Hip fractures increase the chance of death (within one year) by up to 20%.

It is very prudent to prevent hazards at home to prevent falls, as well as to try to reduce the impact of a fall should it happen.

Most falls occur from slips and trips, and less often from a height. Slips happen when there is very little friction or traction between the shoes and walking surface, when the floor is wet or the rugs/mats are loose, for example.

Trips are more likely to happen when the house is cluttered, the carpet is wrinkled, the room is too dark , cabinet drawers are left open or the walking surface is uneven.

### How to Prevent Falls

Here are tips to prevent this from happening to you or your loved ones:

- **Learn about your medication.** In order to prevent falls, discuss appropriate medication and the correct dosages with your doctor. Make sure you discuss interactions between medications that can have side-

effects or increased grogginess, which can lead to falls.

- **Discuss previous falls.** You may have fallen before or managed to not fall on account of having had someone help you. Make sure you discuss these instances clearly to give your doctor a clear picture of what could be causing the falls and how you can reduce them.
- **Use bathroom safety.** Bathrooms are an area where a majority of falls occur, both in elderly and young people. Ensure you install anti-skid mats or tiles as required. Install safety features, such as grab bars that will help you grip. Also, consider having a phone line in the bathroom so you can call for help if necessary.
- **Ramps and stair lifts.** Stairs are another area where falls can be dangerous. If you have weak knees or difficulty climbing, consider doing a renovation and installing a ramp in place of stairs. Such processes can be expensive, so cheaper options include having a stair lift installed to make it easier for you to get around.

- **Wear proper shoes with a good grip and padding.** Avoid wearing heels indoors as much as you can, and if you can give these up altogether for your safety, it would be best. Buy comfortable shoes or try shoes that offer padding and good back support. Orthopedic heels are a great idea for those with osteoarthritis-related problems.
- **Make sure you get regular eye checkups.** Visual acuity or the lack thereof is a reason for falls sometimes. Get your eyes checked and make sure you update your prescription glasses when necessary if you have vision impairment.
- **Exercise regularly and keep moving.** This is a good way to keep yourself fit and active. Loss of flexibility and low bone mass from lack of movement can also lead to greater falls. Being active and eating right, as well as taking calcium supplements are all factors important to avoid falls and have a healthy, safe life.
- **Safety in the home.** Ensure your home is well maintained. If you have furniture that is loose or rugs that tend to trip people up, remove them. Install lighting wherever required, especially around dimly lit areas where you can trip or fall due to lack of light. Clear ice and snow off the walkway, and keep your home safe for you and your loved ones.

**If You Fall**

There are several ways to reduce the impact of a fall. Try not to fall sideways or straight down, since hip fractures occur most often in these directions. Try to fall forward or to land on your buttocks.

A hand fracture heals faster, and with fewer complications, than a hip fracture; it is better to land on your hands than your hip. Try to grab onto a solid surface (i.e. counter) when you fall.  You can also ask a physiotherapist about wearing a hip pad regularly.

Recovering from a fall is serious business, so do everything you can to avoid falls in the first place.