

Assessing Fall Risk: Tips for Caregivers

The following can increase the likelihood of a fall:

- Gait instability which may appear as shuffling, a weaving path, crossing legs, forward or backward lean.
- Neuromuscular changes – loss of coordination, tremors.
- Loss of muscle strength or muscle atrophy - includes the upper body which is used for balance and impact absorption in falls.
- Sensation loss
- Pain
- Changes in vision and/or hearing.
- Reduced physical activity.
- Fear of falling.

What can I do as a caregiver to help prevent falls?

- Increase overall physical activity level.
- Encourage monitored balance exercises (within capabilities).
- Get hearing and vision checked.
- Place and encourage use of appropriate assistive device when walking both inside and outside. Devices may differ, depending on environment.

What can I do to make our home safer?

- Assess household environment for safety: reduce clutter, keep pets out of walking path, move furniture to create clear pathways for open flow.
- Remove electric cords and throw rugs from floor.
- Remodel or make home revisions to make spaces ADA accessible. For example, adding low or marked thresholds, grab bars in restroom, by bed, at stairs, installing easy open doors, adding a ramp or lift.
- Use night lights and/or motion-detecting lighting.



Other things to consider

- Have person wait upon standing because blood pressure can drop and cause dizziness.
- Do NOT let the person skip meals.
- Ensure they stay hydrated.
- Make sure all shoes fit well and are tied.
- Watch for medication side effects like dizziness, loss of balance, sleepiness. These effects can change throughout the day and night.
- Vestibular functions change as we age and can cause sudden loss of balance or dizziness.

The fear of falling

If someone has a history of a fall in the same year, they are 30-40% more likely to fall again if nothing is done to reduce risk and prevent another fall.

Here are some indicators that someone has a fear of falling:

- Decreased step (natural walking stride) length.
- Lack of visual scanning and head turning to look at environment.
- Grasping at/for objects/"furniture surfing"
- Reduced overall physical activity levels .
- Hesitant (not same as cautious/careful).
- Declining invitations for activity especially in "risky" or uncomfortable situations such as going to places with dim lights, low seats, and unlevel surfaces.

Respite Care Charleston offers free consultations and can provide you with additional resources and education based on your unique needs. Please reach out to us, so you don't have to face dementia-related caregiving challenges alone.

You can reach us at info@RespiteCareCharleston.org or by calling (843) 647-7405. You can also find helpful guides and videos on our website at RespiteCareCharleston.org under the Resources tab.