Preventing Falls and Fractures

Personal Changes
Here are some changes to make:

- **Be physically active**
  - Regular physical activity is a first line of defense against falls and fractures.
  - Physical activity strengthens muscles and increases flexibility and endurance.

- **Review medications**
  - Find out about the possible side effects of medications.
  - Some medications might affect coordination or balance, or cause dizziness, confusion, or sleepiness.
  - Some medications do not work well together, adding to the risk of falls.

- **Limit the amount of alcohol**
  - Even a small amount can affect balance and reflexes.

- **Have blood pressure checked when lying and standing**
  - Check blood pressure and pulse after lying down for at least five minutes and again after getting up.
  - If there is a significant drop:
    - Look at need for medication changes.
    - Check for dehydration.
    - Consider using pressure stockings.

- **Get a vision check-up**
  - Have vision tested regularly or if it has changed. Even small changes in sight can make a person less stable.
  - Wear eyeglasses if they are warranted. Keep them clean and check to see that the frames are straight.
  - Be extra cautious while adjusting to new eyeglass prescription.
  - Take off reading glasses or multi-focal lenses when walking.
• **Choose safe footwear**
  o The soles of the feet have nerves that help in judging the position of the body.
  o The feet need to be in touch with the ground, and shoes need to stay securely with the foot at each step.
  o Wear sensible, low-heeled shoes that fit well and support the feet. Shoes should completely surround the feet.
  o Wearing only socks or wearing floppy, backless slippers or shoes without backs can be unsafe.
  o Choose shoes with non-slip soles. Smooth soles can cause slipping on waxed or polished floors.

**Home Safety**
Well over half of all falls happen at home. Falls at home often happen while a person is doing normal daily activities.

**Some tips to help prevent falls outdoors are:**
- Use a cane or walker.
- Wear rubber-soled shoes to prevent slipping.
- Walk on grass when sidewalks are slick.
- Put salt or kitty litter on icy sidewalks.

**Some ways to help prevent falls indoors are:**
- Keep rooms free of clutter, especially on floors.
- Arrange furniture to give plenty of room to walk freely.
- Use plastic or carpet runners.
- Wear low-heeled shoes.
- Do not walk in socks, stockings, or slippers.
- Be sure rugs have skid-proof backs or are tacked to the floor.
- Put non-slip strips on floors and steps.
- Be sure stairs are well lit and have rails on both sides.
- Put grab bars on bathroom walls near tub, shower, and toilet.
- Use a non-skid bath mat in the shower or tub.
- Avoid wet floors and clean up spills right away.
- Use a cane or walker.
- Keep a flashlight next to the bed.
- Use a sturdy stepstool with a handrail and wide steps.
- Add more lights in rooms.
- Buy a cordless phone – keep it close to answer or to call for help in case of a fall.
After a fall the doctor might suggest that an occupational therapist, physical therapist, or nurse visit the home to assess the home’s safety and give advice about making changes to prevent falls.

**Bone Health**
Maintaining the strength of the bones can help prevent fractures.

Having healthy bones will not prevent a fall, but can help prevent hip or other fractures.

**Osteoporosis** makes bones thin and more likely to break. It is a major reason for fractures in women past menopause. It also affects older men. If bones are fragile, even a minor fall can cause fractures.

**Ways to keep bones strong:**

**Calcium**
- Be sure to consume adequate amounts of calcium.
- People over age 50 should consume 1,200mg of calcium daily by eating calcium-rich foods and taking calcium supplements.
- Good dietary sources of calcium include dairy products such as low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese; orange juice, cereals, and other foods fortified with calcium; dark green, leafy vegetables such as broccoli, collard greens, and bok choy; sardines, salmon with bones, soybeans, tofu, and nuts such as almonds.

**Vitamin D**
- Be sure to consume adequate amounts of calcium and vitamin D.
- Vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium.
- Exposure to sunlight causes the body to make vitamin D. Many older people do not get enough vitamin D this way.
- As a person grows older, their need for vitamin D increases. People ages 51 to 70 should consume at least 400 international units (IU) of vitamin D daily. People over age 70 should consume at least 600 IU daily.
- Herring, sardines, salmon, tuna, liver, eggs, and fortified milk and foods are good sources of vitamin D.
- Vitamin D supplements may also be needed. Talk with the doctor about how much vitamin D is needed. Taking too much may be harmful.
Physical activity
• Should get a total of at least 30 minutes of physical activity a day.
• Find time for activities like walking, dancing, stair climbing, gardening, and weight lifting.

Bone density
• Talk with the doctor about having a bone density test. This safe, painless test assesses bone health and risk of future fractures.
• Medicare and many private insurers cover this test for eligible people. Women over age 65 and all men over 70 should have a bone density test.

Prescription medications
• Some people will need to take prescription medications to improve bone health.
• These medications can slow bone loss, improve bone density, and lessen the risk of fractures.

Smoking and alcohol
• Quit smoking and limit alcohol use.
• Smoking and heavy alcohol use can decrease bone mass and increase the chance of fractures.

Weight
• Maintain a healthy weight.
• Being underweight increases the risk of bone loss and broken bones.