



*Preventing*  
**FALLS**

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A GUIDE FOR HOME SAFETY

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## Introduction

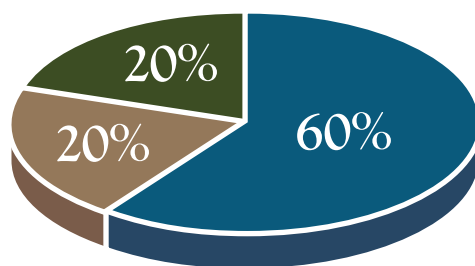
Each year, thousands of older Americans fall at home often sustaining serious injury. On a yearly basis as many as 1.6 million patients over age 65 are treated in the ER and over 13,000 patients *die* because of falls. \$30 billion is spent annually on healthcare related to falls and the average cost of a single fall is \$19,440!

With falls being responsible for so much injury and expense, we at Hospice of the Sacred Heart have developed this brochure to inform our patients and families about fall prevention, and to guide the community in providing a safe home environment for our seniors. An ounce of *prevention* is certainly worth a pound of cure; so read this brochure carefully to find out what you can do to maintain safe, secure and comfortable home surroundings.

## Falls at Home

About 1/3 of seniors over the age of 65 fall each year, and the risk of falls increases with age. By age 80, over 1/2 of older Americans fall annually. 55% of falls occur inside the home and another 30% occur just outside the home. Most falls occur on a level surface (as opposed to steps), and the major reason older patients fall is most often related to *medications*. Often times, medications or lack of compliance with medications, can relate to accidents, dizziness, unsteadiness or difficulties with walking.

- Inside the house
- Outside, but near the house
- Away from the house



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## Falls in Nursing Homes

Each year, the average nursing home with 100 beds reports about 100-200 falls. Some of these falls can result in death, but more commonly cause injuries resulting in fractures, immobility and reduced quality of life.

Although 5% of persons age 65 and over live in nursing facilities, this population accounts for 2 times the rate of falls for seniors in the community. Remember that falls often are a sign of declining health or multiple health problems. Often times, patients in long term care facilities are older, frailer and have many other illnesses that make walking difficult. Also this population of patients will have difficulty with memory, behavior and activities of daily living — all of these can be linked to an increased risk of falling.

Patients residing in nursing homes frequently suffer from muscle weakness, strokes and difficulty walking. These factors along with hazards in the environment, medications and chronic health disorders are common causes of falls in the long-term care setting.



## Hip Fractures After a Fall

*A*s our population continues to age, we can expect a steady increase in falls and the subsequent common complication of hip fractures. Over 90% of hip fractures are caused by falls in the elderly, and by 2040 are expected to number 500,00 per year.

One out of 5 patients with a fractured hip die within one year of the injury, and most spend at least 1 week hospitalized, followed by Long Term Care stays, rehabilitation, physical therapy and home health services. The Medicare costs for hip fracture exceed \$3 billion annually.

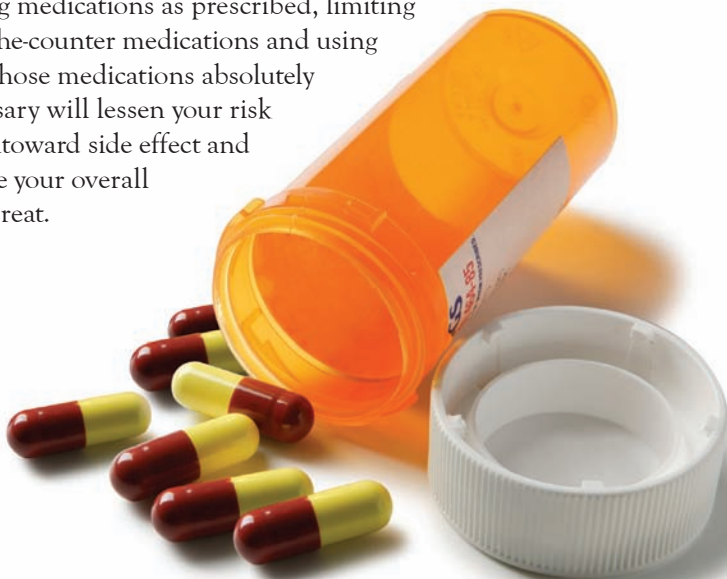
The majorities of hip fractures occur in women and increase with age. Persons 85 and over are 10-15 times as likely to sustain a hip fracture, with osteoporosis increasing the likelihood of a hip fracture occurring following a fall. Lack of exercise, medication side effects, poor vision and environmental hazards all contribute to risk of fall and subsequent hip fracture.

## How Medications Increase The Risk for Falls

The average senior takes **9 medications** or more a day... 6 prescription and 3 over-the-counter. Remember that the more medications you take, the more likely it is that you may experience drug interactions or side effects--all of which may increase your fall risk. Medication side effects can cause you to lose balance, become drowsy, drop blood pressure, blur your vision or become weak and dizzy. Over-the-counter medicines can cause side effects as well, and all medications should be reviewed with your doctor or hospice representative.

Be aware that mixing medications with even small amounts of alcohol can worsen side effects, dramatically increasing fall risk.

Taking medications as prescribed, limiting over-the-counter medications and using only those medications absolutely necessary will lessen your risk for untoward side effect and reduce your overall fall threat.



# What Can You Do To Prevent Falls?

## 1 Review medicines with health providers.....

- Use medications as prescribed by physician
- Use a *single* pharmacy
- Keep an updated medicine list
- Report symptoms to doctor or hospice team member
- Avoid over-the counter medicines
- Do not mix alcohol with any medications

## 2 Begin a regular exercise program.....

- Lowers chances of falling
- Keeps muscles strong, balanced and coordinated
- Allows you to stay mentally alert and feeling better overall
- Check with physician about optimal exercise program

## 3 Have your vision checked.....

- Have vision checked at least yearly by the doctor
- Cataracts and glaucoma may limit vision and lead to falls
- Glasses may need to be updated
- The aging process may limit vision itself

## 4 Make your home safer.....

- Avoid throw rugs
- Use a cane or walker as indicated
- Keep home and hallways bright and clutter-free
- Install handrails/grab bars, especially in bathroom
- Wear well-fitting shoes in and out of house

Staying informed about fall risk in the elderly and sharing this information with friends and family is the best way to prevent falls and avoid unnecessary injury. Our mission at Hospice of the Sacred Heart is to guide your end-of-life journey safely and as free from falls and injuries as possible. Please visit our website for additional information and always feel free to call if you have more questions.





## Safety Hints

- Exercise regularly
- Ask pharmacist to review medications
- Use a cane or walker as required or prescribed
- Have vision checked
- Get up slowly from bed or chair
- Avoid using slippers or going barefoot
- Keep the house and halls bright
- Maintain uniform lighting in your home
- Use contrast edge on top of steps to see stairs better
- Keep emergency phone numbers in large print near phone
- Consider portable hand free phone
- Consider alarm device

## Safety checklist

- Are pathways clear of furniture?
- Were all throw rugs removed?
- Are steps and floors free of boxes, magazines, shoes and other clutter?
- Are extension cords coiled and close to walls?
- Are telephone cords put away to avoid tripping?
- Did you get steps repaired and tack down carpeting?
- Are stairs well lit?
- Ask friends/family to change light bulbs?
- Fix hand rails and place rails on both sides of stairs?
- Did you move frequently used items to lower shelves?
- Are you using a sturdy step stool instead of chair?
- Did you install non-slip rubber mat in bathtub?
- Are there grab bars near tub, shower and toilet?
- Is bedside lamp easy to turn on and within reach?
- Did you place night light in hall to bathroom?

## SUGGESTED WEBSITES

- [www.HospiceSacredHeart.org](http://www.HospiceSacredHeart.org)
- [www.SeriousIllness.org](http://www.SeriousIllness.org)
- [www.LearnNotToFall.com](http://www.LearnNotToFall.com)
- [www.HowToPreventFalls.com](http://www.HowToPreventFalls.com)
- [www.StopFalls.com](http://www.StopFalls.com)
- [www.ActiveForever.com](http://www.ActiveForever.com)

*“Advice is like snow;  
the softer it falls the longer it dwells  
upon, and the deeper it sinks  
into the mind.”*

– SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE



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