

FACT SHEET

Helping My Older Patients Reduce Their Risk of Falling

This document includes discussion topics that you can use to create a safe and non-judgmental opportunity for your patient to reflect on and discuss their perceptions about fall prevention. These discussion topics are structured around the key beliefs that influence an individual's readiness to change their behaviors. These discussions can help your patient identify which changes they are willing to make in their lifestyle and can help increase their readiness to take action to reduce their risk of falling.

Your older (age 65+) patient's readiness to participate in fall prevention strategies is influenced by their individual characteristics, such as sex and physical fitness, as well as their perceptions of fall risk and fall prevention strategies. These perceptions are shaped by their personal experiences and knowledge about falls. Addressing these perceptions strategically and personally can improve your patient's receptiveness to fall prevention strategies.

You play an important role in encouraging your older patient to take action to prevent falls.

Older adults may receive information about falls from those close to them, but they especially value the advice of their healthcare providers. Your office visits with older patients are an opportunity to discuss their modifiable risk factors for falling and ways they can reduce these risks.

Your ongoing conversation and encouragement can motivate your patients to adhere to fall prevention strategies.

Consider scheduling a follow-up visit after the initial encounter to continue the discussion about identified risk factors.

Provider Tip

Make your office a safe place for your patients to openly discuss their concerns.

Some patients may be hesitant to talk about falling because they fear losing their independence.

It may take a few visits for them to be open to talking about it and to then actually take steps to prevent falling.



FACT SHEET

Does your patient understand they are at risk for falling?

Action Items

- ▶ **EXPLAIN** that falls are common among patients who have one or more fall risk factors.
- ▶ **SHARE** positive messaging that explains how fall prevention can help them maintain their independence and ability to perform daily activities. This healthy aging approach may increase their receptiveness.
- ▶ **ENCOURAGE** your patient to take action by creating a sense of urgency to reduce fall risk factors.
- ▶ **DISCUSS** your patient's current fall prevention strategies to see if they align with their risk factors.

Discussion Topics

From my assessment, **identified modifiable risk factor(s)** is/are placing you at a greater risk of falling.

Effective clinical and community interventions exist for the following fall risk factors:

- ▶ Reduced muscle strength
- ▶ Gait or balance disorder
- ▶ Medications with certain side effects
- ▶ Presence of home hazards
- ▶ Vision concerns
- ▶ Feet or footwear issues
- ▶ Vitamin D deficiency

Key Questions to Ask Your Patients

- Do you think it's likely you will fall in the coming year?
- What do you think might make you more likely to fall this year?
- What are you currently doing to reduce your risk of falling?



Quick Facts

- **If patient is 65-84:**
About one quarter of patients your age (or like you) report falling each year.
- **If patient is 85+:**
Over one-third of patients your age (or like you) report falling each year.



There are steps we can take together to reduce your risk of falling.

Educate about fall prevention evidence-based strategies that correspond to identified risk factors.

RISK FACTORS:	STRATEGIES:
Reduced muscle strength	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strength and balance exercises • Physical therapy • Tai Chi
Gait or balance disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strength and balance exercises • Physical therapy • Tai Chi
Medications with certain side effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop, reduce, or change medications associated with increased fall risk
Presence of home hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to occupational therapist to evaluate home safety • Review home safety checklist with your patient
Vision concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to ophthalmologist/optometrist for eye exam • Adjust medications affecting vision
Feet or footwear issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to podiatrist • Educate on shoe fit, traction, insoles, and heel height
Vitamin D deficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommend daily vitamin D supplement



Does your patient believe that falling is not a serious concern?

Action Items

- ▶ **PROMOTE** awareness of the potential for fall-related injuries and how a fall may impact or change their daily life.
- ▶ **EDUCATE** your patient about the impact of falling on their ability to continue doing the things that they currently enjoy or activities they look forward to, such as travel or a grandchild's future graduation.
- ▶ **HELP** your patient understand they can address their fall risk, even in the presence of other medical conditions.
- ▶ **REINFORCE** that a fall and resulting consequences, such as a severe injury, can be prevented if you work together to identify risk factors and take steps to address those risks.

Discussion Topics

A hip fracture or a traumatic brain injury are common serious injuries from a fall. These can lead to you needing to spend time in a rehabilitation or skilled nursing facility.

An injury may restrict your activity, which can weaken muscles and worsen balance. This can increase your fall risk.

If you fall, you may lose some or all of your independence and not be able to do the things you enjoy.

Key Questions to Ask Your Patients

- How likely do you think you are to be injured if you fall?
- What are important activities you might not be able to do if you were to fall and get injured?
- How could a fall impact your ability to live independently?
- How important to you is preventing a fall compared to your other health concerns?



Provider Tip

When discussing the severity of falls, remember to emphasize there are steps patients can take to address their risk.

Fortunately, we know falling can be prevented by addressing your risk factors. **Educate about identified modifiable risk factors and available fall prevention interventions.**

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Does your patient believe that there are benefits to addressing fall risks?

Action Items

- ▶ **EXPLAIN** how these individualized strategies can reduce your patient's risk factors and personalize the benefits of the strategies to your patient's individual goals.
- ▶ **EMPHASIZE** how the benefits of your patient's recommended fall prevention may overlap with addressing other health concerns.
- ▶ **ENCOURAGE** fall prevention as a strategy to maintain independence.



Key Questions to Ask Your Patients

- What do you think we can do that would help prevent you from falling?
- What are the benefits you expect to see from [recommended strategy]?
- What are some activities that you previously enjoyed doing that you have stopped doing because of your risk of falling?
 - Do you think if we reduce your risks, you would be able to do them again?
 - If you follow these fall prevention activities, how would that impact your ability to stay independent and continue doing activities you like?



Provider Tip

If your patient believes they are already addressing their risk of falling, review their current strategies to ensure they are using the most appropriate strategies for their situation.



Discussion Topics

Emphasize the additional benefits your patient will see if they participate in the recommended strategies. For example:

- ▶ Many older adults like going to group exercise classes as it gives them a chance to socialize with others.
- ▶ By participating in an exercise class, you may also help address your [other comorbidity, e.g., hypertension, diabetes, etc.]
- ▶ An exercise class may also help with your fatigue and tiredness, and could give you more energy throughout your day.
- ▶ An eye doctor can check your vision and see if there are things that can be done to reduce your fall risk. For example, wearing single lens glasses outside the home can make it easier to see steps.
- ▶ We may be able to adjust your medications to reduce side effects such as dizziness, blurry vision, or slowed reaction times to reduce your fall risk. These adjustments can also help keep you driving safely.



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Has your patient expressed any concerns about barriers or challenges they may have which prevent them from following prevention guidance?

Action Items

- ▶ **COMMUNICATE** with your patient to identify barriers that restrict them from engaging in the recommended strategies and help the patient identify ways to overcome these barriers.
- ▶ **CORRECT** any misconceptions about fall risks and fall prevention strategies.
- ▶ **DISCUSS** any new barriers during follow-up visits.

Discussion Topics

These are some of the barriers that have been reported by older adults:

- ▶ Lack of time
- ▶ Family obligations
- ▶ Lack of support
- ▶ Finances
- ▶ Transportation
- ▶ Availability of strategy
- ▶ Physical limitations

Key Questions to Ask Your Patients

Ask the patient these questions and troubleshoot any barriers to the extent possible:

- Is there anything that makes you hesitant about starting [recommended strategy?]
- What sort of things make it hard for you to do [recommended strategy?]
- What sorts of things might keep you from doing [recommended strategy?]
- What sort of challenges have you experienced previously that limited your participation in [recommended strategy?]



Provider Tip

Identify any challenges to participating in the recommended intervention during your scheduled follow-up: Since our last visit, have there been any challenges with **recommended strategy?**



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Does your patient seem to have confidence that they can do what you have recommended?

Action Items

- ▶ **REINFORCE** that the recommended strategies are appropriate for your patient and highlight facilitators that can help promote program engagement.
- ▶ **PROVIDE** training and guidance for adopting new strategies.
- ▶ **BREAK DOWN** the strategy into small steps and establish specific, manageable goals that your patient can track and aim to accomplish.
- ▶ **REINFORCE** progression and positive changes upon follow up.

Discussion Topics

Engaging your patient in decision making and identifying measurable goals can empower them and build their confidence to accomplish goals.

How do you feel if we aim for you to:

- ▶ Work on your strength and balance exercises 1-2 times a week.
- ▶ Review a handout on safer footwear.
- ▶ Identify a specialist (e.g. physical therapist, eye doctor, podiatrist) that you could go see.

Key Questions to Ask Your Patients

- How do you feel about starting an activity that would help prevent you from falling?
- What would help you start [recommended strategy]?
- Do you think the recommended strategy is appropriate for you, and do you think it will help reduce your risk of falling?
- How confident are you that you can perform (or participate) in this strategy for the time needed?



Provider Tip

Setting specific measurable goals helps build confidence in their ability to complete the intervention.



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Encourage your patient to take action and stay on track with their plan.

Receiving personalized information from a doctor, pharmacist, or other healthcare provider is an important motivator for a patient to start taking steps to prevent a fall. Your discussion with your patient may be their first cue to do something regarding their fall risk.

Setting additional reminders can help your patient stay on track with their progress.

Help your patient set reminders for the recommended strategy such as:

- ▶ Phone numbers
- ▶ Email alerts
- ▶ Phone calls
- ▶ Written notes
- ▶ Calendar reminders

Discussion Topic

You can also encourage the patient to explain their plan to a family member or friend so they can follow up with their progress and provide additional support.

Key Questions to Ask Your Patients

- How well do you feel you can keep up with these activities?
- Can I help you plan some reminders to help you remember to do these strategies?
- Is there a family member or close friend who could help you stay on track?



Creating a Referral List

Consider compiling a referral list of available resources in your local community to address other common barriers, such as:

- ▶ Appropriate community fall prevention and exercise programs with contact information and/or a list of class schedules and fees such as Silver Sneakers, Tai Chi, and Stepping On.
- ▶ Physical therapists with geriatric certification (board-certified specialists can be found here: [\[bit.ly/3BUJIGXr\]](https://bit.ly/3BUJIGXr)).
- ▶ Community transportation options available for older adults. Some options can be found at [\[bit.ly/3VvKDSjz\]](https://bit.ly/3VvKDSjz) and [\[bit.ly/3jhbf9v\]](https://bit.ly/3jhbf9v).
- ▶ Occupational therapists who do home safety evaluations.
- ▶ Community contractors or home improvement stores that specialize in home safety modifications.
- ▶ Any resources available to support low-income individuals with home modifications.
- ▶ Optometrists and ophthalmologists to monitor changes in eyesight.
- ▶ Podiatrists to assess issues with feet or footwear.
- ▶ Pharmacists to consult with for medication management.

Additional information and resources for both patients and healthcare providers can be found here: [\[bit.ly/3WzkT5O\]](https://bit.ly/3WzkT5O).

