Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

What You Can Do To Avoid Falling

This information describes what you can do to keep from falling at home and during appointments at MSK.

About falls

Falls can be very harmful, but there are many ways you can prevent them. Falls can delay your treatment and can make your hospital stay longer. They can also make you need more tests, such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans. Ongoing cancer treatment may also increase your chances of falling and getting hurt.

Things that can make you fall

Anyone can fall, but some things make you more likely to fall. You're at higher risk for falling if you:

- Are 60 years old or older.
- Have fallen before.
- Are afraid of falling.
- Feel weak, tired, or forgetful.
- Have numbness or tingling in your legs or feet.
- Have trouble walking or are unsteady.
- Cannot see well.
- Cannot hear well.
- Feel dizzy, lightheaded, or confused.
- Use a walker or cane.

- Have depression (strong feelings of sadness) or anxiety (strong feelings of worry or fear).
- Have had a recent surgery with anesthesia (medicine that makes you sleep).
- Take certain medicines, such as:
  - Laxatives (pills to cause a bowel movement).
  - Diuretics (water pills).
  - Sleeping pills.
  - Medicine to prevent seizures.
  - Some medicines for depression and anxiety.
  - Pain medicine, such as opioid medicines.
  - Intravenous (IV) fluids (fluids into your vein).
  - Any medicine that makes you feel sleepy or dizzy.

Make sure your MSK healthcare providers know all the medicines you take, including both over-the-counter and prescription medicines. Some medicines can increase your risk of falling.

How to avoid falling during your MSK appointments

Please visit www.mskcc.org/pe/avoid-falling-appointments to watch this video.

These tips can help you stay safe and avoid falling while you're at MSK:

- Come to your appointment with someone who can help you get around.
- If you use an assistive device, such as a wheelchair or cane, bring it to your appointment.
- Wear safe, supportive shoes. Examples include shoes that have a low heel height, a thin, firm midsole, a slip-resistant sole, and laces or Velcro® to close

the shoe. Do not wear shoes with an open back. To learn more about choosing safe shoes, read *How To Choose Safe Shoes to Prevent Falling* (www.mskcc.org/pe/safe-shoes).

- Ask a member of our staff, such as a security guard or person at the front desk, for help while you're at MSK. They can also bring you a wheelchair to use during your appointment.
- Have someone help you while you're in the dressing room or bathroom. If you do not have anyone with you, tell the person at the reception desk. They will find a nurse to help you.
- Use the grab bars while you're in the bathroom.
- When getting up after lying down, sit at the side of the bed or exam table before you stand up.
- When getting up after sitting, do not rush. Take your time to stand up so you do not lose your balance.
- If you feel dizzy or weak, tell someone. If you're in a bathroom, look for a call bell that you can use to call for help.

How to avoid falling at home

These tips can help you stay safe and avoid falling at home:

- Set up your furniture so you can walk around without anything blocking your way.
- Use a nightlight or keep a flashlight close to you at night.
- Remove rugs and other loose items from your floor. If you have a rug covering a slippery floor, make sure the rug does not have any loose or fringed edges.
- If your bathroom is not close to your bedroom (or wherever you spend most of your time during the day), get a commode. A commode is a type of portable toilet that you can put anywhere in your home. Place it nearby so you do not have to walk to the bathroom.
- Put grab bars and handrails next to your toilet and inside your shower. Never

use towel racks to pull yourself up. They are not strong enough to hold your weight.

- Put anti-slip stickers on the floor of your tub or shower.
- Buy a shower chair and a hand-held showerhead so you can sit while taking a shower.
- When getting up after lying down, sit for a few minutes before you stand up.
- Place items in your kitchen and bathroom cabinets at shoulder height so you do not have to reach too high or bend too low.
- Stay physically active. Doing simple daily activities, such as walking, can help you stay strong and move around better.

Talk with your healthcare provider if you're worried about your risk for falling.

More resources

To learn more about how to keep from falling at home, read the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) booklet *Check for Safety: A Home Fall Prevention Checklist for Older Adults*. It's available in English and Spanish at www.cdc.gov/steadi/pdf/steadi-brochure-checkforsafety-508.pdf or by calling 800-232-4636 (800-CDC-INFO).

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

What You Can Do To Avoid Falling - Last updated on September 3, 2025
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