

Preventing Falls

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Individuals with a developmental disability can be at greater risk of falling and injury than the general population. What's more, a fall—even one that does not result in injury—can lead to a fear of falling, which could cause individuals to limit their activities. The following are some factors that can increase the risk of falling, and tips to decrease that risk.

Factors which increase the risk of falling:

- Medications, especially when four or more are prescribed
- Chronic medical conditions including seizure disorders, complications of diabetes, cerebral palsy, arthritis, sleep disturbances, dementia, low blood pressure, or a change in bowel/bladder habits;
- Poor eyesight and/or hearing; refusal or inability to use adaptive equipment such as eye glasses or hearing aids.
- Unsteady gait or balance;
- Muscle weakness or spasticity;
- Decreased sense of touch or response to pain;
- Inadequate lighting, unsafe floors and surfaces, clutter, or unstable furniture
- Inappropriate or ill-fitting clothing or footwear;
- Improper, broken, or damaged adaptive equipment;
- Absence of environmental adaptations where needed (especially grab bars in bedrooms and bathrooms).

To decrease the risk of falls:

- Encourage all Individuals to attend their regularly scheduled medical and therapy appointments and ask their medical practitioner and/or therapist to perform a falls risk assessment and make recommendations as part of their annual physical exam.
- Control and eliminate environmental risk factors noted above and perform regular environmental checks in homes and other settings where individuals work and recreate.
- When an individual falls, his or her treatment team should discuss and take action to minimize the risk of future falls with input from the individual. Each individual's risk assessment should be evaluated at regular intervals by the treatment team or in clinical meetings.
- Look for ways to incorporate strength and balance building activities in each individual's daily life with input from professional physical and occupational therapists.
- Encourage individuals to wear proper fitting shoes, inside and out, and avoid loose slippers or socks indoors.
- If your agency does not have a falls prevention program or training, advocate for change.

Helpful links:

- The CDC has helpful tools for fall prevention. The STEADI Tool Kit can be accessed at: <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationsafety/Falls/steady/index.html>
- The University of Massachusetts Medical School Center for Disabilities Evaluation and Research: http://www.umassmed.edu/uploadedFiles/cdder/Quality_Assurance_Reports/QINA%20Falls%20Prevention%20tagged_secured.pdf