

## Must We "All Fall Down"?

*Falls are more frequent and more serious with age, but there are many ways to prevent them*

Do you know the most common cause of falls in older adults?  
A. Spills on the kitchen floor  
B. Icy sidewalks  
C. Articles left on the stairs  
D. Getting out of bed

Surprise! The answer is D: In people over age 75, the most likely place to fall is from bed, usually due to dizziness when they try to get up. But the bedroom is just one of many places to look in your house if you want to prevent falls—and prevention is essential for older adults.



Falls happen more frequently as we age. In fact, people age 50 and over accounted for more than 60 percent of all the falls treated last year at the emergency department of Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network, says Judy Bailey, R.N., patient care specialist.

These accidents can have serious health consequences. Especially among people with osteoporosis, falls often lead to fractures. The 250,000 hip fractures that occur in this country each year can permanently reduce mobility, while raising the risk for infection and premature death. You may be surprised to learn that falls and their after-effects are the leading cause of unintentional death in those over age 75, and the second-leading cause in those 45 to 74.

### How do you prevent falls?

Don't wait until you're 75, Bailey says. "Exercise, including strength training, is important to keep your bones and muscles strong. If you've exercised in your younger years, you'll have an easier time adjusting to any shifts in balance that occur with age."

Bailey also recommends that you:

- **Have your vision and hearing checked regularly.** If they're impaired, you may lose important cues that help you maintain your balance.
- **Get up slowly.** A momentary drop in blood pressure can cause dizziness if you stand up too quickly.
- **Talk to your doctor about the medications** you're taking. Some drugs, and combinations of drugs, can cause dizziness.
- **Use a cane or walker** if you sometimes feel dizzy.
- **Wear sturdy, low-heeled shoes** with wide, nonslip soles.

## LEHIGH VALLEY

HOSPITAL AND  
HEALTH NETWORK

LEHIGH VALLEY HOSPITAL  
Cedar Crest & I-78, Allentown  
17th & Chew Streets, Allentown

LEHIGH VALLEY HOSPITAL—  
MUHLENBERG  
Route 22 & Schoenersville Road  
Bethlehem

[www.lvh.org](http://www.lvh.org)  
610-402-CARE

For more information  
or for a physician referral,  
call 610-402-CARE

## Must We "All Fall Down"?

To safeguard your house, Bailey suggests that you:

- **Place grab bars** near the toilet and bathtub.
- **Equip the tub and shower** with nonskid strips or mats.
- **Place light switches near doorways**, so you don't have to walk across a dark room to switch on a light.
- **Make sure all rugs and runners** are fastened down or have nonskid pads.
- **Use a sturdy step stool**—not a chair—to reach high places.
- **Clean up spills immediately.**
- **Keep sidewalks and steps clear.**
- **Use sensor lights outdoors.**



### Why People Fall

There are several reasons why falls are more frequent in older adults:

- Vision weakens due to age or eye diseases such as cataracts or glaucoma.
- The sensory cells in the ears' balance system deteriorate.
- Body mass shifts and fat deposits increase, particularly in women, and that creates a shift in balance.
- You lose agility as muscles and bones weaken, particularly if you have not been active.
- Reaction time slows, so you're less likely to catch yourself when you begin to fall.
- You're more likely to take one or more medications, which may cause dizziness.
- Your central nervous system may be affected by diseases such as hardening of the arteries, which is accelerated by high blood pressure, smoking and diabetes.
- You may not recover fully from injuries that damage your central nervous system or limit your mobility.

Even with these conditions, falls are NOT inevitable! Follow the preventive strategies here and you'll have a much better chance of staying on your feet.

**LEHIGH VALLEY**  
HOSPITAL AND  
HEALTH NETWORK

LEHIGH VALLEY HOSPITAL  
Cedar Crest & I-78, Allentown  
17th & Chew Streets, Allentown

LEHIGH VALLEY HOSPITAL—  
MUHLENBERG  
Route 22 & Schoenersville Road  
Bethlehem

[www.lvh.org](http://www.lvh.org)  
610-402-CARE

For more information  
or for a physician referral,  
call 610-402-CARE