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Start out your holiday season with your best foot forward

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This time of year many of us are busy with cooking, decorating, and attending events, often at unfamiliar places. We have less daylight hours and roads & sidewalks can get slippery. All these things increase your risk for a fall. That's the bad news. The good news is there are a number of things that can be done to reduce the risk of falls. Start the holiday season by learning how you and your family may prevent such falls.

Falls are the second most common reason for accidental injuries in this country and 75% occur in the older adult. Some of the most common predictors of a fall are muscle weakness (for example, difficulty rising from a seated position without using your hands), unsteady balance, a fall the previous year, and certain medications, such as blood pressure, sedatives, and anti-depressants.

To reduce your risk of falling, exercise regularly (dancing or Tai Chi are great!), have regular vision checks, review medications with your healthcare provider, and of course, follow basic household safety guidelines. Below are some basic tips to get you started on your way to a safe holiday season.

These "anytime, anywhere" exercises help improve your balance. Do them as often as you like, as long as you have something sturdy nearby to hold onto if you become unsteady.

Walk heel-to-toe. Position your heel just in front of the toes of the opposite foot each time you take a step. Your heel and toes should touch or almost touch.

Stand on one foot. You can do this while waiting in line at the grocery store or at the bus stop. Remember to alternate feet!

Here's an excerpt from a helpful "step safety" checklist from the Home Safety Council.

- Protect all stairs and steps with a secure banister or hand rail on each side that extends the full length of the stairs
- Use nightlights to help light hallways and bathrooms during night time hours
- Use a non-slip mat or have adhesive safety strips or decals inside tubs & showers.
- Install grab bars in bath & shower stalls.
- Place throw rugs in your home over a rug-liner or use rugs with non-skid backs to reduce your chance of slipping.
- Use a sturdy step stool with hand rails when climbing is necessary.