



Senior Health: When Medicine Affects Your Balance

If your doctor prescribes a medicine that may make you feel confused, drowsy, or dizzy, pay attention to how it affects your balance and how it makes you feel. Take extra care to prevent a fall. A fall can lead to serious problems that can change your quality of life.

Tips to prevent falls when you take high-risk medicine.

What does "high risk" mean?

"High risk" means that a medicine can cause serious health problems or accidents. High risk does not always mean "do not use." It can mean "use with care" when a medicine is more likely to help you than harm you.

As you age, your body changes. When you take medicine, you may get a stronger effect now than when you were younger. For example, you may get more dizzy or drowsy.

Be prepared for side effects.

- If a medicine makes you feel confused, drowsy, or dizzy, rest until the side effect has passed.
- Talk to your doctor about all the side effects you have. Your doctor may want to change your dose or your medicine.
- Make a list of everything you take. Include the dose and when you take it. Keep a copy with you and take it to each doctor's visit. Ask if there are any medicines that you do not need or should not take.
- Use one drugstore, if possible. Before filling a new prescription, give the pharmacist your list of medicines. Ask about possible interactions with anything you are taking. If you use more than one drugstore, make sure each one has your list.

Learn to move wisely.

- Stand up slowly. After you stand up, stay still for a few seconds before you move. If you feel dizzy, don't try to walk.
- If you have a problem with balance, walk carefully. Wear low-heeled shoes that fit well and give your feet good support. Use footwear with nonskid soles.
- If one of your legs is stronger than the other, get into a tub or shower with your weaker leg first. Get out with your stronger side first.
- Use extra care if you use a cane, a walker, or crutches. They can slip out from under you on smooth, wet surfaces.
- If you have glasses, hearing aids, or both, be sure to use them.
- Store items within easy reach. Avoid reaching overhead.

Take care of yourself.

- Before you take any prescription or over-the-counter medicine, ask your doctor or pharmacist if it might make you lose your balance and potentially cause a fall.
- When you are alone at home or outdoors, carry a phone or emergency response transmitter with you. Then you can quickly call for help if you need it.
- Have your vision and hearing checked each year, or anytime you notice a change. Sight or hearing problems can cause falls.
- Talk to your doctor or physical therapist about exercises for improving your strength and balance. Keep active.

When should you call your doctor?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care.

For example, call if:

- You passed out (lost consciousness).
- You cannot get up after a fall.
- You believe you have serious or life-threatening injuries.
- You are having chest pain or trouble breathing.
- You are having trouble speaking, or you have a new weakness or numbness on one side of your body.

Call your doctor now or seek medical care right away if:

- You feel faint.
- You develop severe pain.
- You think you may have passed out but are not sure.
- You hit your head or think you may have hit your head but are not sure.
- You think your medicine may have caused you to fall.

Watch closely for changes in your health and be sure to contact your doctor if you have fallen, even if you are not hurt.

Do not feel embarrassed to let your doctor know you have fallen. Your doctor may be able to adjust your medicine or give other advice so you can prevent more falls.

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