

Step Smart: Choosing Footwear That Keeps You Upright

When it comes to preventing falls, what you wear on your feet really matters! The right shoes can help you stay steady, confident, and active – while the wrong ones can put you at risk. So, what should you look for in safe, supportive footwear?

Features of a Safe Shoe



Smart shoe tips to help you stay steady:

- Choose a **broad, solid heel** for better ground contact.
- Look for a **firm heel collar** for ankle support.
- A **thin, firm midsole** helps you feel the ground and stay balanced.
- **Textured soles** grip surfaces like tire tread.
- **Laces or secure straps** keep shoes snug and stable.

Watch your step – some shoes can raise your fall risk:

- Avoid **slippery, thin soles** that slide easily.
- Skip **loose shoes** without laces or straps.
- Ditch **flip-flops and flimsy slippers** – they lack support.
- Say no to **high heels** – they throw off your balance.

Choose shoes that support you – not just your outfit!

Features of an Unsafe Shoe



Your shoes are your foundation. Good, supportive footwear give you grip, keep your feet secure, and help you handle changes in flooring – from hardwood to carpet to outdoor paths – with confidence.

You've got places to go – let's make sure your footwear keeps up! Learn more at:



Falls Stop Here: Simple Fixes for a Safer Home

Did you know most falls happen at home? The good news: a few simple changes can make your space safer, more comfortable, and easier to navigate. Here's how to get started:

- **Clear the path.** Reduce clutter in walkways and common areas to avoid tripping hazards. Make sure sidewalks, driveways, and walkways are cleared of snow and ice.
- **Let there be light.** Make sure all rooms, hallways, and staircases are well-lit – especially at night.
- **Keep things within reach.** To avoid unnecessary stretching, reaching, or climbing, keep items you use often within easy reach.
- **Watch those furry friends.** Pets are great companions, but they can sometimes sneak underfoot. Stay aware of where they are when you're walking.
- **Take your time.** It's easy to rush when you're in a hurry, but doing so can lead to accidents. Take time to slow down to scan your surroundings and watch for tripping hazards.



Throw rugs may look nice – but they’re a hidden fall hazard. Rugs that bunch up or have curled edges can easily trip you.

If you use rugs or mats, keep these safety tips in mind:

- **Watch for raised edges** – rugs should lie flat at all times.
- **Use non-slip mats** with rubber backing to help them stay put.
- **Consider removing throw rugs** altogether – they’re a common cause of serious falls.

By taking a few simple steps to address throw rugs, you can lower your risk of falls and keep your home a safer place to be!



Discover hidden hazards in your home – and simple steps to fix them – at [FallsFreeWI.org/surround](https://www.FallsFreeWI.org/surround). Explore tools like the printable Home Safety Checklist and the interactive Home Safety Challenge to uncover common fall risks and learn how to prevent them. From slippery floors to poor lighting, small changes can make a big difference.

Take the first step toward a safer home today! Learn

more at:



Listen Up: How Your Ears Affect Your Balance and Safety

Did you know your ears help with more than just hearing? They also play a key role in keeping you steady on your feet. As we age, hearing changes are common – due to things like natural ear changes (yes, they really do get bigger!), long-term noise exposure, health conditions, or even certain medications.



Here are some signs it might be time to check your hearing:

- **Phone calls are hard to follow.**
- **Group conversations feel confusing.**
- You ask “**What?**” more often.
- **TV volume is always high** (and others notice).
- **Background noise makes conversations difficult.**
- People sound like they’re **mumbling**.
- **High-pitched voices** (like children’s) are harder to hear.

If these sound familiar, it may be time to talk to a professional. Taking care of your ears means more than hearing well – it’s a key part of staying safe, steady, connected, and confident every day!

Deep inside your ear is the vestibular system – your body’s built-in balance center. It works with your brain, eyes, joints, and muscles to keep you steady. When it’s off, even a little, it can lead to dizziness, unsteadiness, and a higher fall risk.

According to the Hearing Loss Association of America, most people with hearing loss wait **7 to 10 years** before getting help! That’s a long time to miss out on conversations, connections, and important sounds around you!



Hearing aids can help with hearing loss – and now you can get some over the counter, no prescription needed! While best for mild to moderate hearing loss, they’re a convenient and affordable option for many.

Noticing changes in your hearing?

Don’t ignore the signs – hearing loss can affect more than just conversations. It can impact your balance, safety, and confidence. Find out what you can do – including taking a quick online hearing test – at FallsFreeWI.org/sound/.

Take the first step toward clearer hearing and safer living today! Learn more at:



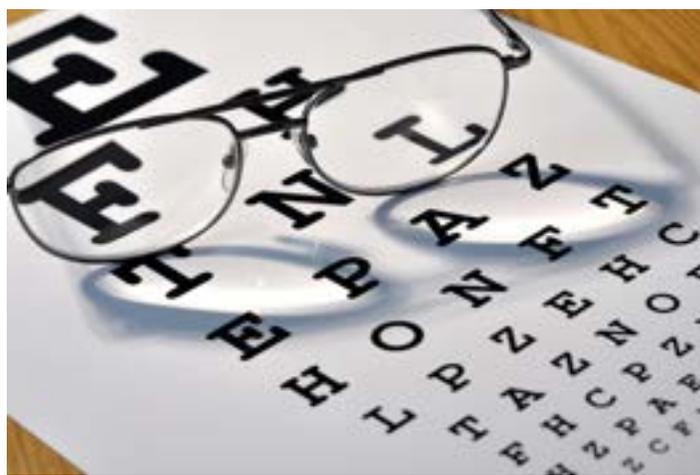
Eyes on Safety: Clear Vision for Steady Steps

Vision changes often happen slowly – so slowly you might not notice at first. Trouble reading fine print or seeing in dim light is common with age, but even small changes can raise your risk of falling. Vision loss can more than **double** your fall risk because your eyes play a big role in balance and navigation.

Here's how to protect your vision and stay steady:

- **Don't ignore changes** – get your eyes checked.
- **Schedule regular eye exams** (at least once a year).
- **Keep your glasses or contacts up to date** and adjust slowly to new prescriptions.

Your vision helps you stay connected to the world – let's keep it clear and strong!



Good lighting isn't just for comfort – it's key to safety. A well-lit home helps you spot tripping hazards and uneven floors, reducing your fall risk.

Simple ways to brighten up and stay safe:

- **Replace burnt-out bulbs promptly** – ask for help if needed.
- Add **nightlights** in bedrooms, hallways, and bathrooms.
- **Always turn on lights** before using stairs or walking through dark areas – even during the day.



Vision changes can make getting around harder and affect your confidence, leading you to avoid activities or social time.

Don't let vision changes dim your independence. If you're pulling back, talk to your doctor or eye care professional – early action can make a big difference!

Explore helpful resources at FallsFreeWI.org/sight/ and see your way to safer living.



Mind Your Meds: How Medications & More Can Affect Your Fall Risk

Some everyday medications – including over-the-counter drugs and herbal supplements – can increase your fall risk. Sleeping pills, anti-anxiety or depression meds, and blood pressure medicines may cause dizziness or balance issues. Taking 4 or more medications regularly can raise your risk even more.

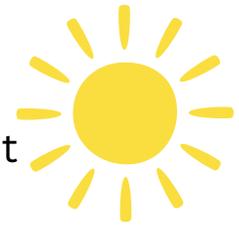
Here are some simple steps you can take to stay safe and manage your medications with confidence:

- **Know your meds:** when, how, and how much to take.
- **Use a pill organizer** to track daily doses, with options for morning and evening.
- **Watch for interactions** with foods, alcohol, OTC meds, and supplements—check with your doctor or pharmacist before adding anything new.
- **Take your time** getting up from bed or chairs to prevent dizziness.



Keeping track of your medications helps protect your balance, your independence, and your peace of mind!

Another key piece? Getting enough calcium and vitamin D to keep bones strong and lower fracture risk. Since winter limits sun exposure, supplements might help—but check with your doctor or pharmacist first, as they can interact with some medications.



Be mindful of alcohol and other substances. Even small amounts can slow reactions, affect balance, and cause dizziness. Some medications interact dangerously with alcohol. Marijuana and other substances can also impair judgment and coordination.

If you're unsure whether your meds or supplements affect your balance, don't guess—ask! Request a **medication review** at your next appointment or prescription refill. It's a simple step to stay informed and safe.



Your doctor and pharmacist are your health partners —speak up, ask questions, and take charge. Learn more at:



Move More, Stay Strong: How Physical Activity Helps You Stay Independent

Want to keep doing what you love—gardening, walking, dancing, or just moving with confidence? Staying active is key to building strength, improving balance, and reducing fall risk!

Even small amounts help keep muscles strong, joints flexible, and bones healthy. The Physical Activity Guidelines for older adults recommends:

- Strength exercises **at least 2 days a week** targeting major muscle groups.
- **150 minutes** of moderate activity (like brisk walking) **or 75 minutes** of vigorous activity weekly.
- **Regular** balance training.



As you get stronger and steadier, everyday tasks like standing up or climbing stairs become easier. Keep challenging yourself by holding balance poses longer, reducing support safely, adding light weights, or doing more reps.

The goal is to keep your body ready for life—stronger and balanced to stay on your feet and enjoy what you love.

Looking for a fun, social way to boost your balance and strength? Exercise classes might be just what you need! They offer guided instruction, motivation, and a chance to connect with others—all helping you stay independent. Plus, they're a great way to meet new people and enjoy staying active.

Programs like Stepping On and Strong Bodies are designed for older adults, focusing on proven methods to improve strength, stability, and confidence in daily life. Want to get started at home? You can find easy-to-follow strength and balance exercises and more information on local classes at fallsfreewi.org/balance-strength.



No matter your age or fitness level, you can build strength and boost balance – starting today! Learn

more at:



Tools for Independence: How Assistive Devices Help Prevent Falls

Grab bars can greatly improve safety—especially in areas like bathrooms and stairs. For best results, they should be installed securely and at the right height by a professional.

Find a Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS) through the National Association of Home Builders at 800-368-5242. If you can't find one, contact your local county or tribal aging unit or Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) for help.

Grab bars aren't one-size-fits-all — placement matters! For tubs and showers, aim for 3 grab bars — at the entrance, on the back or side wall, and near the faucet or showerhead.



By the toilet
33-36" from the floor



Around the bathtub
8-10" from the rim of the tub



In the shower
33-36" from the floor

Tip: Some grab bars double as towel racks for added convenience and style. **Important:** Never use towel racks for support – they're not built to hold your weight.

More smart spots for grab bars: By the front door for extra stability in rain, snow, or ice and at the garage or back doors where steps or slick surfaces can be a fall risk.

Other Helpful Tools:

- **Bed rails** – for steady support when getting in and out of bed
- **Hand-held shower heads** – reduce reaching; pair with a shower chair for comfort and safety
- **Raised toilet seats or toilet frames** – make sitting and standing easier and more stable



Your home should help you stay steady, safe, and independent – every day! Learn more at:



Finding the Right Fit: Using a Cane, Walker, or Walking Sticks?

Not all canes and walkers are alike—and that’s a good thing! The best choice depends on your balance, strength, and comfort.

A **cane** works well for sore hips, knees, or feet, or if one leg feels weaker. A **walker** offers extra support if you feel unsteady or need more stability. Talk with your doctor or physical therapist before choosing.

- **Cane Fit Tip:** Your cane should be the right height! When standing tall with arms relaxed, the handle should align with your wrist crease for comfort and support.
- **How to Use It:** Hold the cane opposite your weaker leg (e.g., right hand if left leg is weaker). Move the cane forward with that leg to reduce pressure and improve stability.



- **Walker Fit:** Adjust handles to align with your wrist bend when arms are relaxed. This helps proper posture and reduces strain.
- **Stay Inside:** Always walk inside the walker frame—not behind it—for the best support and balance.

Need extra support on walks or hikes? **Walking sticks or trekking poles** boost stability, confidence, and joint comfort—especially on uneven ground. Using two can also give you an upper-body workout. If you already use a cane or walker, stick with it—they offer the support you need.

Choose the right walking stick: It should be sturdy, straight, and taller than your elbow. How to use:

- **One stick:** Hold in either hand, move with the opposite leg.
- **Two sticks:** Move opposite arm and leg together—like a natural swing.

With a little practice, using a walking stick can feel effortless—and help you move with confidence!



Remember: Using the right device isn't giving in — it's stepping up your safety and independence!

Learn more at:

