



# Stand Tall, Don't Fall

Winnebago County Fall Prevention Resource Guide

# Falling Is A Big Deal

## Myth vs Reality

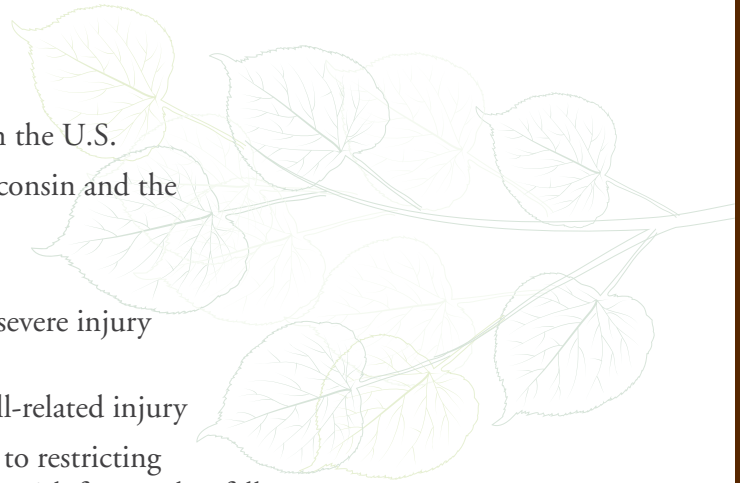
**Myth:** Falling is something normal that happens as you get older.

**Reality:** Falling is not a normal part of aging. There are things you can do to prevent falling. Read on in this brochure!



## If You Fall, You May Not Land Where You Want To

- 1 in 3 older adults over age 65 fall every year in the U.S.
- Falls are the 2nd leading cause of death in Wisconsin and the first cause of hospitalization
- 1 in 4 who fall go to Nursing Homes
- 20-30% of people who fall suffer moderate to severe injury (hip fracture, head trauma)
- Every 29 minutes an older adult dies from a fall-related injury
- Even if you have no injury, fear of falling leads to restricting activity, which weakens your body and increases risk for another fall



## Things You Can Do Now

### Topics Included In This Booklet:

- Take the **Rate Your Risk** quiz
- Talk to your doctor about falls
- Exercise
- Manage your medications
- Wear sturdy shoes
- Take the **Older Adult Depression Quiz**
- Have your vision checked
- Make your living environment safe
- Get enough Calcium and Vitamin D

# Rate Your Risk Quiz

## Check Your Risk For Falling

Please circle “Yes” or “No” for each statement below

Yes (2) No (0) I have fallen in the last 6 months

**Why It Matters** People who have fallen once are likely to fall again

Yes (2) No (0) I use or have been advised to use a cane or walker to get around safely

**Why It Matters** People who have been advised to use a cane or walker may already be more likely to fall

Yes (1) No (0) Sometimes I feel unsteady when I am walking

**Why It Matters** Unsteadiness or needing support while walking are signs of poor balance

Yes (1) No (0) I steady myself by holding onto furniture when walking at home

**Why It Matters** This is also a sign of poor balance

Yes (1) No (0) I am worried about falling

**Why It Matters** People who are worried about falling are more likely to fall

Yes (1) No (0) I need to push with my hands to stand up from a chair

**Why It Matters** This is a sign of weak leg muscles, a major reason for falling

Yes (1) No (0) I have some trouble stepping up onto a curb

**Why It Matters** This is also a sign of weak leg muscles

Yes (1) No (0) I often have to rush to the toilet

**Why It Matters** Rushing to the bathroom, especially at night, increases your chance of falling

Yes (1) No (0) I have lost some feeling in my feet

**Why It Matters** Numbness in your feet can cause stumbles and lead to falls

Yes (1) No (0) I take medicine that sometimes makes me feel light headed or more tired than usual

**Why It Matters** Side effects from medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling

Yes (1) No (0) I take medicine to help me sleep or improve my mood

**Why It Matters** These medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling

Yes (1) No (0) I often feel sad or depressed

**Why It Matters** Symptoms of depression, such as not feeling well or feeling slowed down, are linked to falls

Total \_\_\_\_\_ Add up the number of points for each “yes” answer. If you scored 4 points or more, you may be at risk for falling. Discuss this quiz with your doctor.

This checklist was developed by the Greater Los Angeles VA Geriatric Research Education Clinical Center and affiliates and is validated fall risk self-assessment tool (Rubenstein et al. *J Safety Res*; 2011;42(6)493-499). Adapted with permission of the authors.



**Myth:** Taking medication doesn't increase my risk of falling.

**Reality:** People who take four or more medications or take them incorrectly are at greater risk of falling. Medications such as narcotics, antihistamines and meds for anxiety, sleep and depression can put you at risk for a fall.

## Don't Let Pills Push You Down

- Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist about side effects and interactions of your medications
- Carry a current list of all prescription and over-the-counter medications with you and review the list at each doctor visit
- Talk with your doctor and pharmacist before you take any over-the-counter meds such as herbs, vitamins, minerals, etc.
- Get prescriptions filled at one pharmacy
- Store medicine in the original container so you have the correct information about the medicine
- Install a bright light and keep a magnifying glass in the area that you prepare your medications to prevent wrong or missed doses
- Develop a system to take your medicine and let others help if needed
- Avoid drinking alcohol while on any prescription or over-the-counter medication

## Resources

**Talk to your Pharmacist about your Medications.** It is part of their job. It is helpful to schedule a specific time with your pharmacist to review all of your medicines.

**Personal Medication Review by Pharmacist at Oshkosh Seniors Center:**  
Call 232-5300 for dates

**Automatic Medication Dispensing Systems:**

- **Direct Link Medical Alert System:** HomeHelpers Direct Link 1-800-216-4196
- **LifeDirect Affinity Health System:** 738-2711 or toll free 1-855-244-9753  
[www.affinityhealth.org/page/services-additional-lifedirect](http://www.affinityhealth.org/page/services-additional-lifedirect)

**Medication Setup Systems:** Speak with your pharmacist about other medication set up systems such as monthly bubblepacks or weekly medication set-up boxes.

Call Winnebago County Health Department for sample medication list  
(920) 232-3000 or (920) 727-2894

### No Health Without Mental Health Everyone Needs A Checkup From The Neck Up

- We take care of our physical health—we see a doctor if we have a physical injury, chest pain or breathing problem. It is just as important to take care of our brain and our mental health
- Depression and Dementia can cause changes in walking and balance, leading to a fall
- Research has shown those with any degree of Depression were up to 70% more likely to have multiple falls and injury than those who were not depressed
- Participate in activities that improve your memory: exercise, socialize, eat healthy, get enough sleep, do crossword puzzles, Soduko, brain games, take a class

**Myth:** Depression is to be expected as I get older; I can just snap out of it if I think positively.

**Fact:** Depression is not a normal part of life for anyone. Depression is a serious illness — just like diabetes. Expecting positive thinking to cure depression is like expecting a person with diabetes to lower his blood sugar level by thinking happy thoughts. Most people need treatment to manage depression.

### Older Adult Depression Quiz

Choose the best answer for how you have felt over the past week:

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| 1. Are you basically satisfied with your life?                                | Yes / No |
| 2. Have you dropped many of your activities and interests?                    | Yes / No |
| 3. Do you feel that your life is empty?                                       | Yes / No |
| 4. Do you often get bored?  | Yes / No |
| 5. Are you in good spirits most of the time?                                  | Yes / No |
| 6. Are you afraid that something bad is going to happen to you?               | Yes / No |
| 7. Do you feel happy most of the time?  | Yes / No |
| 8. Do you often feel helpless?  | Yes / No |
| 9. Do you prefer to stay at home, rather than going out and doing new things? | Yes / No |
| 10. Do you feel you have more problems with memory than most?                 | Yes / No |
| 11. Do you think it is wonderful to be alive now?                             | Yes / No |
| 12. Do you feel pretty worthless the way you are now?                         | Yes / No |
| 13. Do you feel full of energy?   | Yes / No |
| 14. Do you feel that your situation is hopeless?                              | Yes / No |
| 15. Do you think that most people are better off than you are?                | Yes / No |

Count number of answers in orange. Total \_\_\_\_\_ A score > 5 points is suggestive of Depression. Make an appointment to see your health care provider now and bring this with you.

## Resources

**Winnebago County Crisis Hotline Number:** 233-7707 or 720-7707

**Suicide Hotline:** 800-273-8255

**Winnebago County Behavioral Health:** 236-4600 or 727-2882

**Memory Assessment:** Ask primary doctor for memory assessment.

**Brain Fitness Classes**

**Valley VNA:** 727-5555      **Oshkosh Seniors Center:** 232-5300

Contact **Aging and Disabilities Resource Center** for additional resources:  
(877) 886-2372      [www.co.winnebago.wi.us/adrc](http://www.co.winnebago.wi.us/adrc)

# Strength & Balance

## Myth vs Reality

If you are having any difficulties moving about, you are at great risk for a fall. Limiting activity because you are afraid of falling will only make you weaker and at greater risk for a fall.

- Are you experiencing dizziness, lightheadedness, stiffness, pain, balance problems?
- Do you hang onto objects to help you get around?
- Is it hard to reach up or bend over?

**Myth:** What's the use, I am too old and weak to exercise.

**Reality:** It is never too late to get stronger. Strength and balance can be improved at any age or with any health condition.

## What to do:

1. Call your doctor's office now and explain why you need to get in to see the doctor as soon as possible. Take the Rate Your Risk Quiz and bring it with you.
2. Talk with your doctor to see if you may need a referral for further services such as:
  - Physical Therapy/Occupational Therapy
  - Exercise Program
  - Suggestions for equipment
  - Home evaluation for proper assistive equipment to increase safety and independence
  - Neurology consult or Pain Clinic
3. Talk with your doctor about need for a walking aid such as a cane or walker.
  - Ask about a walker with a built in seat.
  - Maybe it is time for a motorized scooter or wheelchair.
4. Make sure your cane/walker is the right type of device and size for you. Ask for help from a healthcare professional such as a nurse or physical therapist to make sure your cane/walker is fitted correctly to you.
5. Get involved in an exercise program that focuses on strength and balance.

## Resources

### Strength & Balance Classes

- **Living Well with Chronic Conditions**

6-week workshop teaches real-life skills for living a full, healthy life with a chronic condition.

Contact Affinity Nurse Direct: (800) 362-9900

- **Strong Bones**

A progressive strength-training program designed to improve muscle strength and balance, bone density, self-confidence, sleep and vitality. 12 week class meets one hour, twice a week.

Call Winnebago County Health Department

(920) 232-3000 or (920) 727-2894

[www.co.winnebago.wi.us/health](http://www.co.winnebago.wi.us/health)

- **T'ai Chi**

Chinese low impact exercise consisting of a series of very slow and deliberate movements that is gentle enough for any age or physical ability. Beginners and Advanced classes are offered.

Oshkosh Seniors Center: (920) 232-5310

- **Stepping On**

7-week program that provides specific knowledge and skills to prevent falls.

Affinity Nurse Direct: (800) 362-9900

- **Senior Center Programs**

Oshkosh: (920) 232-5300

[www.ci.oshkosh.wi.us/Senior\\_Services](http://www.ci.oshkosh.wi.us/Senior_Services)

Menasha: (920) 967-3530

Pickett: (920) 589-6111

Omro: (920) 685-0380

- **Local Park and Recreation Department**

Oshkosh: (920) 236-5080

Neenah: (920) 886-6060

Menasha: (920) 967-3640

- Check your local YMCA for more class options. Financial assistance available if unable to pay.

Neenah-Menasha: (920) 729-9622

[www.ymcafoxcities.org](http://www.ymcafoxcities.org)

Oshkosh: Downtown location (920) 236-3380

20th location (920) 230-8439

[www.oshkoshymca.org](http://www.oshkoshymca.org)



**Myth:** Nutrition needs do not change with age.

**Reality:** Nutrition status of older adults has been shown to be a determining factor in the risk of falling, severity of injuries incurred and recovery time after a fall-related injury.

## Vitamin D is Important for Preventing Falls

Vitamin D is a nutrient needed to maintain strong bones (along with Calcium) and to help muscles to move. People who get too little vitamin D may develop soft, thin, brittle bones and muscle weakness, which can contribute to falls and fractures. Research shows that Vitamin D helps to reduce falls in older adults, especially those at risk for falling.

- Our diets usually do not supply enough Vitamin D for our needs
- Aging decreases the ability to make Vitamin D from the sun

## Are you getting enough Vitamin D?

- Talk with your healthcare provider about Vitamin D testing (it's a simple blood test).
- If Vitamin D is recommended, be sure you know what type to take and the amount.
- The American Geriatrics Society Recommendation for Vitamin D supplements is at least 800 IU per day for older persons but your doctor may recommend more.
- Talk with your pharmacist about interaction of Vitamin D with medicines you are currently taking.

## Calcium is Important for Healthy Bones

Calcium is a key nutrient for healthy bones, strength and structure. 99% of the body's calcium is stored in the bones. When there is not enough calcium in the diet, other organs and muscles take it from the bones. Over time, a deficiency of calcium can result in bone loss and contribute to osteoporosis. Getting the recommended amounts of calcium and vitamin D can help to increase bone strength at any age.

- The recommended FDA for women over age 50 is 1200 milligrams (mg) of calcium.
- For men up to age 70, it is 1000 mg
- For men over age 70, it is 1200 mg
- Dairy products such as yogurt, milk, and hard cheeses are good sources of calcium.
- Check in with your doctor to see if you are deficient in calcium and need to take a supplement.

## Resources

### Meal Sites:

Call ADVOCAP at 725-2791 or (800) 922-7760 to sign up for the following meal sites:

**Oshkosh:** Court Tower Apts., Marian Manor, Mainview, Senior Center, Heritage Court

**Menasha:** Senior Center

**Neenah:** Hearthside Apts.

**Omro:** Community Center, Fox View Manor

**Pickett:** Community Center

**Winneconne:** Riverside Apts.

### Cooking For One:

[www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)

[www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy\\_eating/meals.html](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/healthy_eating/meals.html)

### Home Delivered Meals:

**ADVOCAP/Winnebago County Nutrition Program:**

725-2791 or (800) 922-7760

**Oshkosh Family Inc., Meals on Wheels** (Homebound Oshkosh only): 651-3316

**Valley VNA Meals on Wheels** (Homebound in Neenah and Menasha only) 727-5555

Contact **Aging and Disabilities Resource Center** for food pantries, SHARE Programs and other meal resources:

(877) 886-2372 [www.co.winnebago.wi.us/adrc](http://www.co.winnebago.wi.us/adrc)

**Myth:** I do not need to get my vision checked every year.

**Reality:** Vision is a key risk factor for falls. Aging is associated with some forms of vision loss that increase risk of falling and injury.

## Vision

- Have your vision checked at least once a year and update your prescription eyeglasses
- Get your eyeglass frames adjusted if bent - it is usually free at any vision store

## Incontinence

- Problems with urine control, also known as incontinence, can happen to anyone at any age. It can also lead to a fall when:
  - you slip on the floor that is wet with urine
  - you have a sudden urge so you hurry to get to the bathroom to avoid a urine accident
  - you wake up often at night leaving you feeling groggy, which can decrease your balance
- Incontinence can be treated and often cured! Let your healthcare provider know immediately of the problem. Sometimes it is a urine infection that can be quickly treated with antibiotics and the incontinence goes away. Other urine problems can be treated with lifestyle changes, bladder training, exercises, medications or in some cases surgery.

## Foot Care

- Do not walk in bare feet or stocking feet-too slippery. Shoes worn indoors are your safest bet. Slippers are too loose fitting. If you like, keep one pair of shoes just for indoors
- Wear sturdy, well-fitted low heel/flat shoes that tie or Velcro
- See your healthcare professional if you have pain, calluses, corns, decreased sensation in feet or if you are unable to trim your own toenails

## Resources

### Vision Programs

- **Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

Home visits, group trainings, techniques for use in daily living, demonstrate adaptive equipment; information & referral services.

[www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/blind](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/blind)

Call: (920) 831-2090

- **Wisconsin Talking Book and Braille Library**

Lending library specializing in Talking Books and recorded magazines.

[www.dpi.wi.gov/rll/wrlbph/index.html](http://www.dpi.wi.gov/rll/wrlbph/index.html)

Call: (800) 242-8822

- **Visually Impaired Persons (VIP) Support Group**

1x/month for support, education, socialization

Oshkosh Seniors Center: 232-5300

Thompson Community Center in Appleton: 225-1714

If you need further help for finding an eye doctor, glasses or adaptive equipment, call the Aging & Disability Resource Center of Winnebago County toll free at (887) 886-2372

### Incontinence

Talk to your doctor about going to a specialist that deals with incontinence.

### Foot Care

Low cost community clinics offer nail care by Registered Nurses:

Oshkosh Seniors Center: 232-5300

Menasha Senior Center: 967-3530

Winnebago County Health Department: 232-3000 or 727-2894

Valley VNA Clinics in Neenah, Menasha, Oshkosh: 727-5555

Clarity Care: 236-6560



**Myth:** As long as I stay at home, I can avoid falling.

**Reality:** Most falls take place at home.

## Check Your Home For These Easy-To-Fix Safety Hazards

### Floors:

- Ask someone to move the furniture so your path is clear.
- Remove the rugs or use double-sided tape or a non-slip backing so the rugs won't slip.
- Pick up things that are on the floor. Always keep objects off the floor.
- Coil or tape cords and wires next to the wall so you can't trip over them. If needed, have an electrician put in another outlet.

### Stairs and Steps:

- Pick up things on the stairs. Always keep objects off stairs.
- Fix loose or uneven steps.
- Have an electrician put in an overhead light at the top and bottom of the stairs.
- Have an electrician put in a light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs. (You can get light switches that glow).
- Have a friend or family member change the light bulb that is burned out.

- Make sure the carpet is firmly attached to every step, or remove the carpet and attach non-slip rubber treads to the stairs.
- Make sure handrails are on both sides of the stairs and are as long as the stairs. Fix loose handrails or put in new ones.

### Kitchen:

- Move items in your cabinets. Keep things you use often on the lower shelves (about waist level).
- If you must use a step stool, get one with a bar to hold on to. Never use a chair as a step stool

### Bathrooms:

- Put a non-slip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub or shower.
- Have a carpenter put grab bars inside the tub and next to the toilet.

### Bedrooms:

- Place a lamp close to the bed where it's easy to reach.
- Put in a night-light so you can see where you're walking. Some night-lights go on by themselves after dark.

## Moving Safely Outdoors in the Community

### Be Alert to Hazards

- Cracks and uneven sidewalks.
- Holes, dips and rocks when walking on grass.
- A covered patch of ice or a pothole filled with snow.

### Walking Safely

- Scan ahead as you walk.
- Place heel down first then toes-when walking.
- Keep your head up, chin in, and shoulders back, This helps you to look ahead and walk with confidence.

### Getting Around The Community Safely

- Wear sturdy shoes. Consider traction devices for your shoes in the winter.
- Use the handrails.
- Cross only at the lights and when the signal reads "walk." If the light starts to flash "don't walk" when you are already crossing, don't panic and rush across the street, but continue at a safe speed.

- Make eye contact with the driver before you cross the road, even on a pedestrian crossing.
- Cross the road with a group.

### Be Extra Careful In Windy Weather And When There Is Snow Or Ice

- Wear bright-colored clothing and carry a yellow bright-colored umbrella.
- If you feel unsteady, remember to ask for help—it's a sign of strength, not weakness.
- Plan ahead for outings so you don't have to rush.
- Take slower, smaller steps when walking over snow or ice.
- Keep sidewalks and driveways well shoveled. Apply rock salt, other ice melting products or sand to create traction on wet or icy patches. If needed, get help with shoveling or plowing after a storm.

## Resources

**Home Fall Risk Assessment** - Stay Active Be Confident: Free Home visit by RN to Winnebago County residents wanting to reduce their risk of a fall. Call Winnebago County Health Department at (920) 232-3000 or (920) 727-2894.

**Free/Low Cost Loan Equipment**  
**American Red Cross of East Central WI**  
**Medical Equipment Loan Program**  
(920) 231-3590 • (888) 231-3590

**Larsen/Winchester Lions Club**  
Call (920) 427-3244 to see if item needed is in loan closet.

### Mobility Equipment

Smart people use canes, walkers or any device that helps them stay safe.

- Talk with your health insurance representative:
- Refer to phone book or google search: Medical Equipment or Rehabilitation Services
- Refer to Aging & Disability Resource Center of Winnebago County or call (877) 886-2372  
[www.co.winnebago.wi.us/adrc](http://www.co.winnebago.wi.us/adrc)

**Call your doctor for a fall assessment, referral for equipment, or for physical therapy.**

### Fall Prevention Is A Team Effort; Who To Call For Help

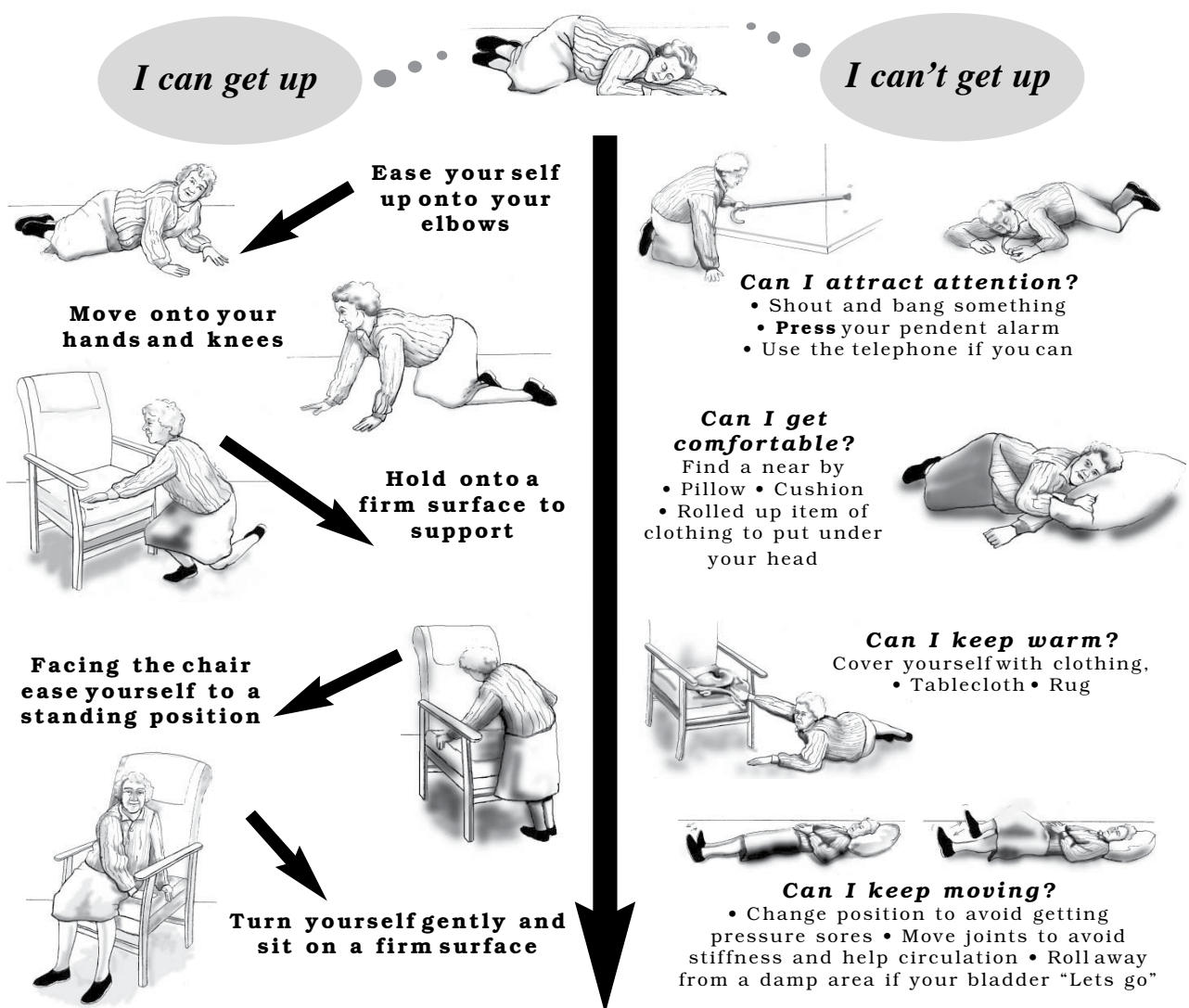
You are a relative, friend or neighbor of an older adult who you feel is at risk of falling in their home. You are unsure of what to say or do because you don't want to upset them or hurt their feelings. You need to let the older adult know about your concerns and offer support to help them maintain the highest degree of independence possible. There are many sources of help.

- Check with parish nurse for resources
- Ask a neighbor for help
- Develop a buddy system with a neighbor to check on the older adult
- Local health department
- Talk with their physician
- Personal emergency response systems
- In home care: bathing, housekeeping, companion

**Myth:** I don't need to talk to anyone about my risk of falling. I want to keep my independence.

**Reality:** Fall Prevention is a team effort. Bring it up with your doctor, family, and anyone else who is in a position to help. They want to help you stay in your home as independent as possible.

## I have had a fall



## Resources

### Aging & Disability Resource Center of Winnebago County

An Information and Assistance Specialist will inform callers of the appropriate resources. Can include a face-to-face visit in the office or the home.

(877) 886-2372 [www.co.winnebago.wi.us/adrc](http://www.co.winnebago.wi.us/adrc)

### Direct Link Medical Alert System

24-hour personal emergency response systems

HomeHelpers Direct Link (800) 216-4196

### Lifeline

Waterproof necklace or wristband.

• Aurora VNA: (800) 686-4314

[www.aurorahealthcare.org/services/vna/lifeline.asp](http://www.aurorahealthcare.org/services/vna/lifeline.asp)

• ThedaCare: (920) 738-6391

[www.thedacare.org/Home-Care-and-Senior-Living/Home-Safety/Lifeline.aspx](http://www.thedacare.org/Home-Care-and-Senior-Living/Home-Safety/Lifeline.aspx)

### LifeDirect

Completely mobile unit can travel with you anywhere in the United States.

Affinity Health System: (920) 738-2711 or toll free 1 (855) 244-9753

[www.affinityhealth.org/page/services-additional-lifedirect](http://www.affinityhealth.org/page/services-additional-lifedirect)

### FirstCall and CareTracker System

24 hour monitoring system with sophisticated fall detector.

Evergreen at Home: (920) 237-2155

# Winnebago County Fall Prevention Coalition

## Mission Statement:

The mission of the Winnebago County Fall Prevention Coalition is to reduce falls and fall-related complications and deaths among Winnebago County adults through the integration of best practices from community based and medical prevention approaches.

## Who We Are:

The coalition is made up of interested community members and health professionals that have on-going concern over the high rate of falls in Wisconsin and in our local community. Members are engaged in disseminating information about proven falls prevention programs and educating older adults about how they can reduce their risk of falling.

## Contact Information

The Winnebago Fall Prevention Coalition would like to invite anyone interested in local fall prevention activities to contact Barb Wolf, RN or Teresa Paulus, RN Winnebago Health Department at 920-232-3000 or [www.co.winnebago.wi.us/health](http://www.co.winnebago.wi.us/health)

## List of Organizations on the Coalition

Aging & Disability Resource Center of  
Winnebago County  
ADVOCAP, Inc.  
Affinity Health System  
Affinity Visiting Nurses  
Assisi Homes of Neenah  
Aurora Health Care  
Brightstar  
Extencicare Health  
Lakeland Care District  
Menasha Health Department  
Morton LTC Pharmacy  
New Haven, Inc.

Network Health  
Oshkosh Family Inc.  
Oshkosh Fire Department & EMS  
Oshkosh Seniors Center  
Rehab Arisces LLC  
ResCare, Inc.  
Trauma Center at ThedaCare  
ThedaCare At Home  
Valley VNA Senior Services  
Walgreens Pharmacy  
Winnebago County Health Department  
Zion Lutheran Apartments

*The Winnebago County Fall Prevention Coalition meets quarterly and membership continues to grow.*

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