



## “Jackie Brown’s TOP TEN Ways to Prevent Falls”

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We all dream of living long, healthy lives in our own homes with a little help from Meals on Wheels or a visiting nurse. However, the risk of falling is a serious threat to the independence of seniors.

“In our community, we see a lot of seniors in the emergency room with broken ribs and bruises from falling,” said Jackie Brown, Integrated Care Director at Southeast Health Group. “It takes a long time to recover from these injuries, and half of seniors who sustain fall-related injuries have to stay at a rehab facility or nursing home for a period of time before returning home.”



Some people believe that falls are a normal part of aging, but in fact, they are preventable. The more you know about how falls happen, the more actions you can take to prevent falls. Here is a list of the **Top Ten ways you can reduce falls**:

- 1) Wear proper fitting, supportive shoes with low heels or rubber soles. Avoid wearing smooth-bottom house slippers and stocking feet.
- 2) Make sure your home has clear walkways, sturdy handrails and low storage shelves. At least one-third of all falls in the elderly involve environmental hazards in the home. Keep things picked up off the floor, replace burned out light bulbs and tack down loose rugs. Apply brightly colored tape to the face of the steps to make them more visible.
- 3) Take time to recover your balance when rising from a chair or bed. Reach and bend properly, to avoid straining muscles and joints.
- 4) Exercise regularly to improve muscle tone, and increase strength, balance and flexibility. Many people enjoy walking and swimming.
- 5) Install grab bars and handrails in the bathroom and use a shower chair for stability. Handrails should be 34 inches high and have a diameter of about 1.5 inches. Use color and contrast to make them visible against the wall. Install a portable, hand-held shower head, and use nonskid mats or carpet on floor surfaces that may get wet.

6) Use a nightlight between the bedroom and bathroom. Put in a bedside light with a switch that is easy to turn on and off (or a touch lamp). Locate a telephone within reach of the bed, and adjust the height of your bed to make it easy to get in and out of.

7) Ask your doctor to monitor your bone density. Osteoporosis is a condition where your bones become more porous, less resistant to stress, and more prone to fractures. This can be caused by hormonal changes, calcium and vitamin D deficiency, and a decrease in physical activity.

8) Eat or drink calcium and take Vitamin D supplements to strengthen your bones. Postmenopausal women need 1,500 mg of calcium daily. Calcium-rich foods include milk, yogurt, cheese, fish and shellfish, selected vegetables such as broccoli, soybeans, collards and turnip greens, tofu and almonds.

9) Have regular checkups by an ophthalmologist to monitor eye diseases such as cataracts and glaucoma. These eye diseases can affect your depth perception, visual acuity, peripheral vision and susceptibility to glare, which make it difficult to safely negotiate your environment. Something as simple as cleaning your eye glasses each morning can improve visibility, as well.

10) Know the common side effects of all the medications you take. Some medications can contribute to falls by reducing mental alertness, worsening balance and gait, and causing drops in blood pressure while standing. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about ways to reduce your chances of falling by using the lowest effective dosage, regularly assessing the need for continued medication, and the need for walking aids while taking medications that affect balance.

“Most falls do not result in serious injury,” said Brown, “However, there is often a psychological impact. About 25 percent of people age 75 or over unnecessarily restrict their activities because of a fear of falling. We want people to live their lives to the fullest, so we hope our seniors will put some of these tips into practice to prevent falls and injuries.”

For more information about Southeast Health Group, visit [www.southeasthealthgroup.org](http://www.southeasthealthgroup.org).