

Preventing Falls in Older Adults

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) has issued **final** recommendations on *Preventing Falls in Older Adults*.

These recommendations are for adults ages 65 and older who live in the community. That means that they do not live in an assisted living facility or a nursing home.

The Task Force reviewed research studies on ways to prevent falls in older adults. The

recommendations summarize what it learned about the potential benefits and harms of these approaches. This fact sheet explains the recommendations and what they might mean for you: (1) Exercise or physical therapy and vitamin D supplements can help prevent falls in older adults. (2) An in-depth exam to assess risk for falls is not necessary for all older adults but may be useful for some.

Falls: A Big Problem for Older Adults

Falls in older adults are common. More than one-third of older adults living in the community fall at least once a year, resulting in broken bones, cuts, head injuries, and visits to the emergency room or the hospital. Many older adults stop going out and doing things they enjoy because they are worried about falling and getting hurt.

Preventing Falls in Older Adults

The Task Force reviewed five strategies that can be used to identify older adults who are at increased risk for falls and to prevent falls:

- An in-depth exam to see why an older adult may be likely to have a fall. This exam may include a number of things like asking about previous falls, testing the person's balance and walking, testing vision, and testing blood pressure after standing up.
- Treatment for a specific problem that might be causing falls. These treatments can include vitamin D supplements, protein supplements, treatment for vision problems, and stopping medicines.
- Exercise or physical therapy.
- Changes at home to decrease the chances of a fall, such as getting rid of loose rugs.
- Counseling about falls and how to prevent them.

Potential Benefits and Harms

The Task Force found that taking vitamin D supplements can help prevent falls in older adults. Taking vitamin D supplements has little potential harm.

Exercise and physical therapy improve the strength and balance of older adults, and have been shown to prevent falls. The Task Force found that while these activities also may lead to falls in a few people, overall many more people benefit.

The Task Force found that a few things can greatly increase the chances of a fall for an older adult. These include previous falls and difficulty with balance and walking.

The Task Force found that an in-depth exam is not likely to be useful for all older adults who may be at risk of falling. However, it may be useful for some people, including those who have fallen before and those with other health problems. An in-depth exam is effective only when it includes a plan to help reduce the risks for falls, including referring the person to medical and other services, if needed.

The Task Force did not find enough evidence to make a recommendation for or against other strategies.

The Task Force Recommendations on Preventing Falls in Older Adults: What Do They Mean?

Here are the recommendations on preventing falls in older adults. The recommendations have letter grades. The grades are based on the quality of the evidence about ways to prevent falls and on the potential benefits and harms of these approaches. The grades are explained in the box at the end of this fact sheet.

When the Task Force recommends a preventive approach (Grade A or B), it is because the approach has more potential benefits than potential harms. When the evidence shows that an approach is likely to have only a small benefit in general, but may be useful for some individuals, the Task Force gives it a Grade C. The Notes explain key ideas.

Visit the Task Force Web site to read the [full recommendation statement](#) on preventing falls in older adults. The statement explains the evidence the Task Force reviewed and how it decided on the grades. An [evidence report](#) provides more detail about the studies the Task Force considered.

1 The Task Force recommends each of the following **interventions**:

- Exercise or physical therapy
- Vitamin D supplementation

to prevent falls in **community-dwelling** adults ages 65 years and older who are at **increased risk for falls**. **Grade B**

2 The Task Force does not recommend **automatically performing** an in-depth **multifactorial risk assessment** in conjunction with **comprehensive management** of identified risks to prevent falls in community-dwelling adults ages 65 years and older. **Grade C**

Notes

1 interventions

Exercise or vitamin D supplements can help prevent falls in older adults, and they have few potential harms.

community-dwelling

People who do not live in an assisted-living facility or nursing home.

increased risk for...

Older adults who are more likely to fall than other older adults; this includes those who have fallen in the past and those with walking and balance problems.

2 automatically performing

Doing an in-depth exam with every patient who is 65 years of age and older.

multifactorial risk assessment

An in-depth exam that looks at many different factors that could raise the risk of falls, such as previous falls, difficulties with balance and walking, and hazards at home.

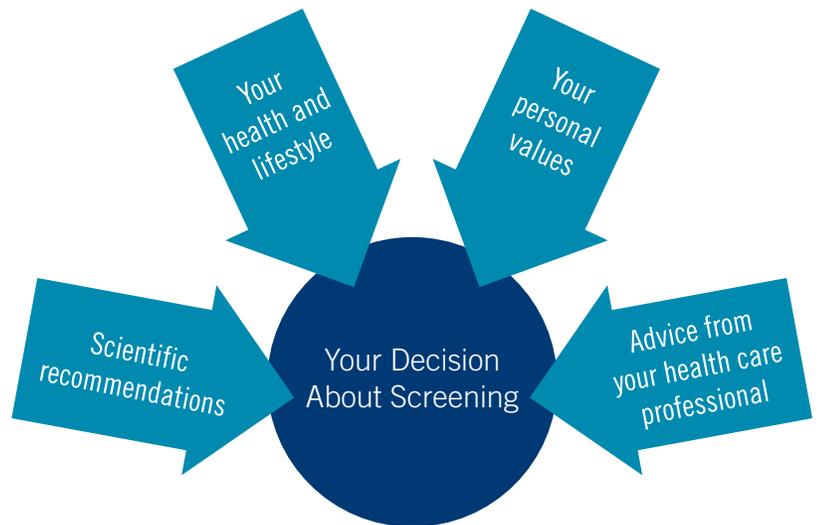
comprehensive management

A plan to help reduce the chances of falling, including referrals to medical and other services if needed.

Should You be Assessed for and Take Actions to Prevent Falls?

Getting the best health care means making smart decisions about what screening tests, counseling services, and preventive medicines to get and when to get them. Many people don't get the tests, counseling, or preventive medicines they need. Others get ones they don't need or that may be harmful to them.

Task Force recommendations can help you learn about screening tests, counseling services, and preventive medicines. These services can keep you healthy and prevent disease. The Task Force recommendations do not cover diagnosis (tests to find out why you are sick) or treatment of disease.



[How do you decide whether to be assessed for your risk for falls and whether you should take actions to prevent falls?](#) Consider your own health and lifestyle. Think about your personal beliefs and preferences for health care. Talk with your health care professional about your risk for falls. And consider scientific recommendations, like this one from the Task Force. If you are interested, talk with your health care professional about how you might use exercise, physical therapy, and vitamin D supplements to help prevent falls. If you do get an in-depth falls exam, discuss the results of your exam and next steps.

What is the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force?

The Task Force is an independent group of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine. The Task Force works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services, such as screenings, counseling services, or preventive medicines. The recommendations apply to people with no signs or symptoms of the disease being discussed.

To develop a recommendation statement, Task Force members consider the best available science and research on a topic. For each topic, the Task Force posts draft documents for public comment, including a draft recommendation statement. All comments are reviewed and considered in developing the **final recommendation statement**. To learn more, visit the [Task Force Web site](#).

USPSTF Recommendation Grades	
Grade	Definition
A	Recommended.
B	Recommended.
C	Recommendation depends on the patient's situation.
D	Not recommended.
I statement	There is not enough evidence to make a recommendation.

Click Here to Learn More About Preventing Falls in Older Adults

-  [Falls and Older Adults](#) (NIH SeniorHealth.gov)
-  [Falls—Older Adults](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
-  [Go4Life](#) (National Institute on Aging)
-  [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#) (US Department of Health and Human Services)