



## Preventing Falls in Older Adults Who Take High-Risk Medicines

### What does "high risk" mean?

"High risk" means that a medicine can cause serious health problems or accidents. Some high-risk medicines include muscle relaxers, anxiety and sleep medicines, opioid pain medicines, and some over-the-counter allergy and cold medicines.

They're called high-risk because they may make you feel drowsy or dizzy or affect your balance.

If you take 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. When you know what to expect from your medicines, you can take extra care to prevent a fall.

### Learn about your medicines.

Know the side effects of the medicines that you take. Ask your doctor if the medicines you take can make you sleepy, less alert, or affect your balance. For instance, sleeping pills and some medicines for anxiety can affect your balance.

If you take two or more medicines, talk to your doctor about how they work together. Sometimes combinations of medicines can make you dizzy or sleepy. Either of these can lead to a fall.

Find out if a treatment without medicine might work for you.

### Make a list of everything you take.

**Keep a copy of your medications (including the dose and when you take it) with you and bring it to each doctor's visit.** Ask your doctor if there are any medicines that you don't need or shouldn't take. Also, be sure to ask if you could lower your dose of any of the medicines.

Use one drugstore, if possible. Before you fill 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.

Talk to your doctor about all the side effects you have. Your doctor may want to change your dose or your medicine. Be sure to tell your doctor that you only want to take medicines that you really need, at the lowest possible dose.

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## Learn to move wisely when taking high-risk medicines.

- 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 that give your feet good support. Use footwear with nonskid soles.
- If you are very weak, have someone help you get up, walk, and bathe.
- 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.

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