



MASSACHUSETTS
GENERAL HOSPITAL

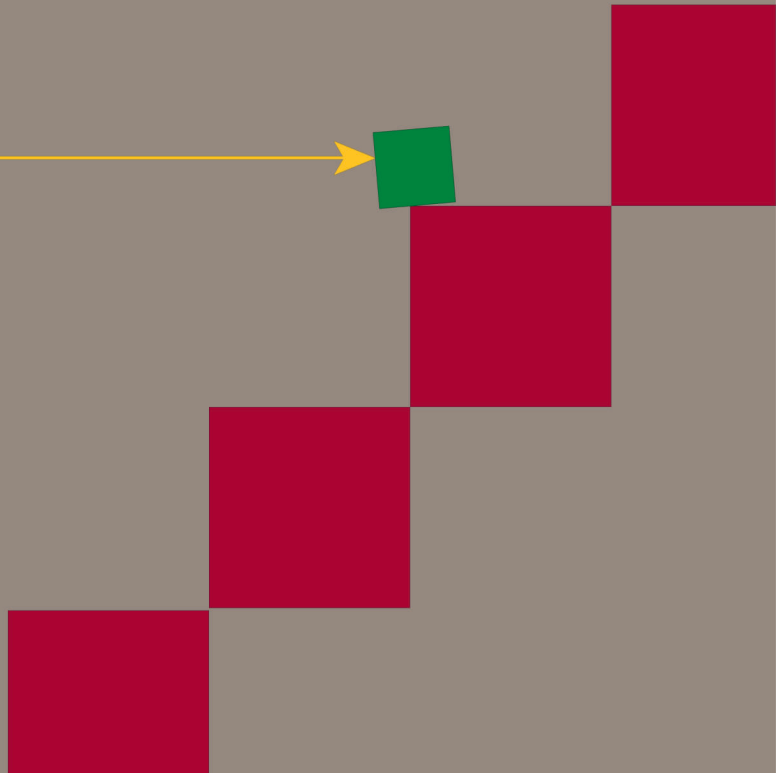
PATIENT CARE SERVICES

Preventing Falls

*in the Hospital
and at Home*

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HEALTHCARE

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When you are admitted to Massachusetts General Hospital, you may be identified by your nurse as someone who is at risk for falling. Falls can cause serious injuries and our goal is to keep you as safe as possible while you are here. This material will review risks for falling, steps you, and our staff, can take to reduce your risk, and things you can do at home to make it safe for you.

Your risk for falling may include:

- **History of Recent Falls:** People who have fallen once are likely to fall again. Let your nurse know if you have had a recent fall.
- **Age over 65 years:** Falls are a leading cause of injury and death among older people. Your age is an important risk factor to consider.
- **Medical Problems:** Some medical conditions may cause you to feel weak, dizzy, light headed or unsteady on your feet. Diabetes, heart disease, circulation problems and lack of exercise can affect your balance. Women with osteoporosis can easily break their hips in a fall. Let your nurse know if it is hard for you to walk or rise from a chair. You will be given assistance.
- **Vision or Hearing Problems:** Poor vision and hearing can lead to a person to feel disoriented. Let the nurse know if you will need assistance.
- **Confusion, delirium, or dementia:** Altered thinking and confusion can lead to poor judgment and decisions. Your safety is our top priority.
- **Unfamiliar Environment:** Some people may get confused when they awaken at night and find themselves in an unfamiliar environment. Please ask for assistance.

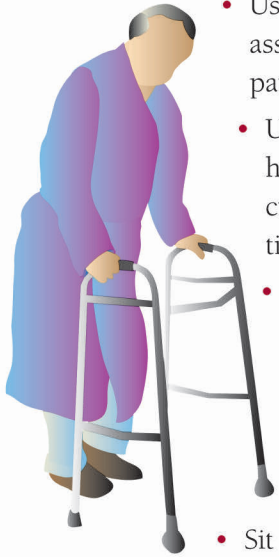
- **Walking Aids:** Canes, crutches, walkers and other walking aids should be used if needed. However, while in the hospital, please ask for assistance when using these aids.
- **Increased need to urinate:** An Intravenous “IV” is commonly used to give you fluids. This extra fluid, as well as some medications, may cause you to have to use the bathroom more frequently. Please ask for assistance to use the bathroom.
- **Anesthesia/Medications:** Medication used during surgery to make you sleep (anesthesia), and relieve pain (analgesia), may cause you to feel lightheaded or dizzy. If you receive a “nerve block” to numb an area of your body such as an arm or leg, it may be difficult to walk and move normally. Please ask for assistance to get up.
- **Pain:** Pain in your surgical incision may make it hard for you to move around. This is particularly true if the surgery was done in your arm or leg. Please ask for assistance to get up.



Preventing Falls *in the Hospital and at Home*

Things you can do to decrease your risk for falling while in the hospital:

- Wear non-skid slippers or shoes so you can walk with good traction
- Clear the floor of obstacles when walking around the room
- Wear your glasses and hearing aids when you are awake
- Keep a light on near your bed
- Give yourself some time to get oriented to your environment when you first wake up
- Use the “call bell” to request assistance from the nurse or patient care assistant
- Use any walking aid you may have such as crutches, a cane or walker every time you get up
- Do not lean on your bedside table or IV pole to support you (they have wheels and will roll away from you)
- Get up slowly from a lying or sitting position
- Sit on the side of the bed for a moment before getting up
- Keep your pain under control so it will be easier for you to move around



Things we pledge to do to keep you safe from falling:

- Identify your risk level for falling and communicate it to the health care team
- Educate you and your family about preventing falls in the hospital
- Provide assistance to help you get out of bed and walk
- Create a safe room environment: orient you to your room and how to call for help
- Keep equipment and supplies stored in safe places.
- Ensure your “call light” is always within reach
- Respond to all of your calls in a timely manner
- Monitor medications that may make you sleepy or dizzy
- Elevate the side rails on your bed if needed to keep you safe
- Use a bed alarm pad so we will know if someone at risk is trying to get out of bed
- Monitor your fluid intake to anticipate your bathroom needs
- Check on you frequently to see if you need to use the bathroom, need pain medication, or need to get out of bed



Things you can do to decrease your risk for falling while at home:

Many falls in the home can be prevented. A key to fall prevention is to stay healthy and fit. Staying active is one of the best things you can do to prevent falls.

These tips can help:

- Stay Healthy: Have a physical exam each year to identify any new medical problems
- Stay active: balance, flexibility, strength and endurance all come from exercise
- Check with your doctor if you take any medications that make you feel weak, sleepy or dizzy. They may be able to adjust your medications.
- Eat a balanced diet.

Remove Hazards:

- Keep your home free of clutter
- Remove things that can cause you to trip (rugs, boxes, cords)
- Arrange furniture to provide a clear pathway between rooms
- Store and work with items at counter level to avoid too much bending or reaching
- Do not stand on chairs or unsteady stools
- Do not store items on the stairs
- Keep all walkways clear
- Clean up spills right away
- Avoid scatter rugs and keep a nonskid mat in the bathroom



Add Safety Devices:

- Use properly installed rails in the bathtub for support
- Place a slip proof mat in the tub
- Add handrails to both sides of stairs
- Buy a raised toilet seat
- Do not use towel rods or sliding doors for support as they are not designed to hold your weight
- Get a portable phone. Keep a phone and emergency numbers within easy reach

Improve Lighting:

- As you get older, you need brighter lights to see well
- Add nightlights to halls, bedrooms and bathroom
- Put light switches at the top and bottom of stairs
- Be sure each room has proper lighting
- Keep a flashlight available

What to do if you fall:

- Stay calm
- If you start to fall, relax your body to reduce the impact of the fall
- Call out for help
- Dial 911 if it is an emergency from home