

Medication and fall risk

Are your medications increasing your risk of falls?

Medications acting on the brain (also known as centrally acting medication) can increase your risk of falls due to their adverse effect on brain function, resulting in drowsiness, slower reaction times and impaired balance. Some cardiovascular medications (medications to treat heart, circulation and blood pressure problems) can increase your risk of falls too, but others have been shown to decrease your falls risk. Some medicines can make you dizzy or lightheaded, which can predispose you to falling over. You should never stop or change your medications without talking to your doctor.



Medications that can make falls **more likely**:

1. **Taking four or more medications** increases your risk of falling.
2. **Centrally acting medications** (a group of medications that act on the brain and can affect thinking, emotions and behaviour. These medications can cause drowsiness, slow reaction times and impaired walking and balance which may increase your falls risk).
 - *Antipsychotics* e.g. haloperidol, risperidone
 - *Antidepressants* e.g. citalopram
 - *Benzodiazepines* e.g. sleeping tablets, anti-anxiety medications, Valium (diazepam)
 - *Opioids* e.g. narcotic pain medications, morphine, oxycontin
 - *Antiepileptic* e.g. Epilim (sodium valproate)
3. **Loop Diuretics** (a specific type of diuretic used to treat congestive cardiac failure and/or high blood pressure) e.g. Lasix (frusemide).

Medications that can make falls **less likely**:

1. **Beta-blocking agents** (most commonly used for treatment of high blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, chest pain, glaucoma and migraines) e.g. metoprolol.

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Key points to remember:

- Taking ≥ 4 medications could increase your fall risk
- Some medications can make you more likely to fall
- Some medications have side effects e.g. dizziness, slow reaction time, drowsiness and thinking problems
- Talk to your doctor about your medications and make sure that your doctor reviews your medications regularly
- Don't stop or change your medications without discussing with your doctor

What can I do right now?

- Make a list of all medications you take including herbs, tablets or supplements as well as medicines you buy from the pharmacy
- Ask your doctor to review this list thoroughly once a year
- If you take 4 or more medicines a day, they may need to be reviewed more often (every 6 months).
- If you feel dizzy or find it hard to concentrate, contact your doctor or pharmacist straight away

Tip:

- If you find it difficult to remember which medications you take and when to take them, ask your pharmacist or doctor about devices that may help such as pill boxes or Webster-paks®.
- For more information on medications you are taking talk to your GP/doctor or pharmacist. You can also visit the following website for helpful consumer information: <https://www.nps.org.au/>.

Disclaimer: This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your healthcare needs and how to prevent falls, you should seek advice from your health professional. This information is evidence from research up to 2016 (published 2018). They are generalizable for people >60 years. The associations between medications and falls may not be causal, but we have presented the best evidence at this point in time.