

Responding to a Fall

What do I do if there is a fall?

Having an unexpected fall can be a very scary experience, not only for the person who fell, but also for the caregiver or family. Keep in mind that falling is not necessarily an emergency situation. Knowing how to appropriately deal with a fall will help avoid panic and allow for better decision-making.

Step One: CHECK for INJURY

Before moving the person, it is important to make an assessment to determine if the fall caused any serious injury that requires urgent medical attention.

- Check for alertness and to make sure responses are typical/appropriate. For example, ask a few simple questions that they should be able to answer easily, such as, “What is your address?” or “Do you know my name?”
- Make sure that all body parts that should move can move, and look for obvious broken bones or joint dislocations.
- Make sure there is no significant bleeding.
- Check head, neck and spine movements.

If serious injury is noted or suspected, do not attempt to move the person, as this could cause additional injury. In this case, call 911 for emergency medical assistance.

If there is no sign of serious injury, make a plan for getting up safely from the floor.

Step Two: GETTING UP

Methods of getting up from the floor can vary greatly depending on how much assistance the person typically requires for transfers. Highly functioning people will likely be able to get up without much assistance by using their environment. Someone who is not able to mobilize well may need to be lifted off the floor with either a mechanical lift or with a 2 person lift method.

USING THE ENVIRONMENT

If it is safe to try to get up, make sure to check the environment for safety and to determine what can be used to help accomplish a safe transfer. Using a solid surface to grab to or push from can help make moving from the floor easier. Solid surfaces commonly found in the home include a bed, a sofa or coffee table. You could also use a locked wheelchair for support. Avoid grabbing onto things that are likely to tip over or break free as this could result in a second fall (e.g., tables that have only a center base, towel bars in the bathroom, unsteady chairs, etc.).

- Move into position next to the solid surface support.

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- Get onto your hands and knees next to the surface.
- Place hands up onto surface and move knees around to be fully facing surface.
- Move one foot up so you are in half-kneeling position.
- Push down with arms and forward leg to get up onto feet.

Ask for help if you do not feel that you can safely accomplish getting up on your own, even if it means you have to wait.