
COPING

BE SAFE

Do a home survey to remove obstacles and install supports to prevent falls.

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Fall Prevention & Home Safety for those with Vestibular Disorders

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Living with a vestibular disorder means your balance system may not always provide reliable cues. Dizziness, vertigo, or unsteadiness can appear suddenly and without warning, increasing the risk of falls—not just for older adults, but for people of all ages.

A well designed home environment can make everyday activities easier, reduce fall risk, and help you move with greater confidence. By intentionally using vision, touch, and stable surfaces, you can support your balance system and stay oriented—even when symptoms fluctuate. This article introduces a practical 3 Zone Home Safety Assessment you can use to evaluate both the inside and outside of your home.

This guide may be helpful if you:

- Experience vertigo, dizziness, or unsteadiness
- Use a cane or walker (sometimes or often)
- Feel anxious about falling
- Avoid certain activities because of balance concerns

FALL PREVENTION AND WHY HOME SAFETY MATTERS

For people with balance disorders, falls are a real concern. Even if you have never experienced a fall, the fear of falling can lead to reduced activity, social withdrawal, anxiety, or depression. Medications, vestibular rehabilitation therapy, and safety strategies all play an important role in prevention.

Your home should work with your balance system, not against it. Vestibular conditions often require you to rely more heavily on vision and body awareness (proprioception). A safe environment allows these systems to compensate when your inner ear is not providing accurate information.

THE 3 ZONE HOME SAFETY ASSESSMENT

To complete this assessment, walk around your home three separate times, focusing on one zone during each walk. Include both indoor and



outdoor areas, entrances, steps, paths, and gates. Take notes or create a to do list as you go.

Zone 1: Eye Level

Vision supports balance when the inner ear cannot. Good lighting and visual clarity help stabilize your posture and reduce unnecessary head movements. As you walk through your home, ask yourself:

- Can I see clearly during the day and at night?
- Is lighting adequate in hallways, stairs, and bathrooms?
- Would I still see well if the power went out?
- Are items stored overhead easy to reach without climbing?

Consider adding brighter lighting, night lights, or motion sensor lights where needed.

Zone 2: Hands and Seat Level

Immediate access to support allows safe recovery during sudden dizziness.

Walk through your home again, stopping every 5-7 feet. Each time you stop, imagine:

- What if I suddenly became dizzy?
- What if I needed to sit down right now?
- Is there something sturdy nearby to grab—such as a counter, railing, or grab bar?
- Is there a chair without wheels available to sit on quickly?

Your arms and hips are your emergency support system—make sure they have something reliable to use.

Zone 3: Ground Level

Stable, predictable surfaces reduce missteps and sensory conflict.

During your third walk, focus on floors and walking paths:

- Are pathways clear in every room?
- Are there small rugs, clutter, or cords on the floor?
- Do floor surfaces feel firm and stable underfoot?

Although rugs can be decorative, they are a common tripping hazard. Firm, level surfaces are best for balance. If you prefer carpet, wall to wall carpet with a low pile and minimal padding provides better stability than thick padding. Outside, paths should be level, wide, and predictable, with handrails

added where slopes cannot be avoided.

EVERYDAY FALL PREVENTION STRATEGIES

In addition to home modifications, these habits can further reduce fall risk:

- Wear non skid shoes that fit securely
- Choose well fitting clothing that won't catch or drag
- Stay physically active to maintain strength and flexibility
- Have your vision checked regularly and keep prescriptions current
- Monitor blood pressure and medication side effects
- Limit alcohol intake
- Discuss balance concerns with your healthcare provider or therapist

Making changes at home can feel overwhelming or emotional. That's normal. Start with one or two high impact improvements and build from there. Every positive change—no matter how small—supports your safety and independence.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS BY AREA

Entrances to the Home

- Ensure all doors open easily and provide safe clearance
- Reduce high thresholds or add railings to steps
- Make sure gates unlock quickly in emergencies
- Check that mats lie flat and do not shift



From this → **To this**
Consider installing a railing at all entrances to your home.

Kitchen

- Keep walking paths clear



- Use low profile rubber mats if needed
- Consider a rolling cart to move items safely

Bathroom

- Install grab bars near the toilet and inside the shower
- Use an elevated toilet seat if needed
- Consider a shower chair for added stability



Bedroom

- Sit at the edge of the bed for a few moments before standing
- Allow your body time to orient before walking
- Keep lighting, glasses, and mobility aids within reach
- Ensure a clear, well lit path from bed to bathroom

Yard, Garage, and Car

- Maintain level, wide outdoor paths
- Avoid stepping stones or loose gravel
- Add bright lighting in garages
- Store frequently used items at waist or chest



Consider installing a concrete path around your yard.

From this → To this

level

ASSISTIVE DEVICES AND EXTRA SUPPORT

If you use a cane or walker, having more than one can be helpful—such as keeping one on each level of a multi story home. If you use a cane, adding a wrist strap can help keep it nearby when you need your hands free.

Finally, don't hesitate to ask for help. Invite a friend to complete your home safety walk through with you or hire help for tasks that require climbing or heavy lifting. A physical or occupational therapist can also provide personalized guidance in the home on your journey back to balance.



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