GETTING UP AFTER A FALL

Can you learn to fall safely and get up again?

By Russ L'HommeDieu, DPT, ATP, CFPS · Doctor of Physical Therapy, RESNA Assistive Technology Professional, Certified Fall Prevention Specialist · October 16, 2026



Yes, but only with hands-on training from a physical therapist (PT) or occupational therapist (OT) first. A therapist can teach you how to land in a way that protects your bones and a step-by-step way to get up from the floor. The most important skill after any fall is checking yourself for injury and knowing when to stay down and call 911.

Before you try any of this

Do not practice falling or getting up from the floor on your own, using only an article or a video. Training from a PT or OT is essential. A therapist will:

- Check whether these techniques are safe for your body, your bones and your health conditions.
- Adapt each step to your strength, joints, balance and any pain.
- Start you on a padded mat or a bed, never a hard floor, and stay right beside you.
- Decide when you are ready to move to the next step, and when a technique is not right for you at all.

Talk with your doctor before you start, especially if you have osteoporosis, a recent fracture or surgery, a joint replacement, dizziness, heart or blood pressure problems, or trouble with balance. Practicing without guidance can cause the very injury you are trying to prevent. The rest of this article explains what a therapist may teach, so you know what to ask for. It is not a do-it-yourself guide.

Why this matters

Even with the best plan, some falls still happen. Part of fall prevention is making a fall less harmful: a safer landing, a faster rescue and, when it is safe, the skill to get up.

Getting up is a big deal. One in eight older adults who fall lie on the floor for more than an hour, and up to 80% of people over 90 cannot get up on their own. A long lie can bring dehydration, kidney injury, pressure injury, hypothermia (a dangerous drop in body temperature), pneumonia and a loss of confidence. Our earlier article, I've fallen and I can't get up, covers what to do in that moment. This article covers how to prepare.

Falling more safely

A therapist may teach techniques like these and adapt them to you. Learn them only in supervised sessions.

- **Tuck and roll.** Let your body rotate as you go down, so you land on large, padded areas like the buttocks and thigh.

- **Squat into a backward fall.** Bending your knees lowers you closer to the ground before you land.
- **Do not catch yourself on a stiff, straight arm.** That reaction is natural, but it can break a wrist.
- **Avoid landing straight on your side when you can.** Falling sideways raises the chance of a hip fracture about sixfold. Strong hip muscles help you stay upright when you start to tip sideways.

Some therapists adapt martial arts break-fall techniques with great care. These are never something to try at home without your therapist present.

First, check yourself for injury

After any fall, the first job is not getting up. It is finding out whether you are hurt. Getting up too fast, or with an injury you have not noticed, can turn a fall into a much more serious one.

1. **Stay still.** Take a few slow breaths and let the shock pass.
2. **Notice how you feel.** Are you dizzy, confused, short of breath or having chest pain? Did you hit your head or black out?
3. **Check for pain.** Starting at your head and moving down, notice any sharp or severe pain, especially in your head, neck, back, hips, wrists or shoulders.
4. **Gently test movement.** Slowly try moving your fingers, hands, arms, toes and legs. Stop if anything causes sharp pain.
5. **Look for bleeding** or any limb that looks out of shape.

Call 911 and stay where you are if:

- You hit your head, especially if you take a blood thinner.
- You blacked out, or you feel confused, very dizzy or faint.
- You have chest pain, trouble breathing, or new weakness, numbness or slurred speech.
- You have severe pain in your hip, groin, back or neck.
- One leg looks shorter than the other or is turned outward, or you cannot put weight on it.
- You cannot move an arm or leg, or a joint looks out of shape.
- You are bleeding heavily.

- You have tried and cannot get up, or you have been on the floor for a long time.

When in doubt, call 911. It is often the best and safest choice. Calling for help is not a failure, and emergency crews would much rather come out than have you hurt yourself trying to stand. Keep your phone or medical alert button on your body so you can always reach help.

Getting up from the floor, step by step

Only try this if you have checked yourself, you are not hurt, and you have practiced it with your therapist. The usual sequence looks like this:

1. **Roll onto your side.**
2. **Push up to your hands and knees.**
3. **Crawl to a sturdy chair** or another solid piece of furniture.
4. **Bring one foot forward** so you are in a half-kneel.
5. **Push up and turn to sit** on the chair. Rest before you stand.

If anything hurts, or you feel dizzy at any point, stop, get as comfortable as you can and call for help.

Therapists often teach this backward, starting with the last step. You first practice going from kneeling to sitting in a chair, with the therapist beside you. Once that feels easy, you add the step before it, and so on, until you can start from lying on the floor. This builds success at each stage.

If you cannot get up

- Call 911 or press your medical alert button.
- Keep warm. Pull a blanket, towel or clothing over you if you can reach it.
- Shift your position from time to time, if it does not cause pain.
- Stay as comfortable as you can until help arrives.

This is why a phone should be on your body, not across the room. A medical alert button (pendant or wrist, ideally with automatic fall detection) can shorten a long lie, but many older adults wait too long to press it. Practice pressing it so it feels normal. Technology helps, but it never replaces a person checking in.

Who should practice, and how

Practice only when it is safe and supervised by a PT or OT. Ask your doctor first. In therapy, a floor transfer test checks whether you can get down to and up from the floor, which helps spot who is at risk of a long lie. If you are not sure how to find a therapist, ask your doctor for a referral or use the ChoosePT directory linked below.

A note for family caregivers

If your parent falls, do not rush to help them up. First help them check for injury using the steps above. If there is any sign of injury, or you are unsure, keep them still and warm and call 911.

If they are not hurt, do not drag or lift them. Coach them through the steps their therapist taught them, and bring a chair close. Lifting can injure both of you. If they cannot get up with coaching, call for help.

If you ever have to call the fire department just to help someone up (a "lift assist"), treat that as a warning sign. It is a reason to ask the doctor for a full falls assessment.

Getting unstuck

Some people freeze in place or feel their balance slipping while standing. The "5 S" method, best learned with your therapist, helps:

- **Stop.**
- **Stand tall.**
- **Shake it off.**
- **Shift your weight.**
- **Step forward.**

How Home Safety Solutions can help

During a home safety visit, we look at where a fall is most likely to happen in your home and whether there is a sturdy chair or surface nearby to help you get up. We also look at how you would call for help and suggest a plan your family can practice. We can also help you connect with a physical or occupational therapist for hands-on fall training. Learn what happens during

a home safety visit. Call (813) 365-9171 or email info@homesafety.solutions.

Related reading: I've fallen and I can't get up · How do I prevent falls at night? · Find a physical therapist (ChoosePT) · Is it normal to fall as you get older?

This article is general education, not medical advice. In an emergency, call 911. Talk with your doctor, pharmacist, or therapist about your own situation.

Want a plan for your own home?

Every service starts with an Initial Consultation, a 30-minute phone call with Dr. L'HommeDieu.

Book at homesafety.solutions