

# Balance, Falls, and Safety in the Home

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**Huntington's Disease Society of  
America**

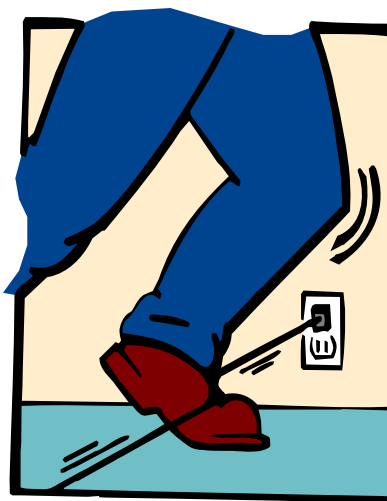
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# FALL PREVENTION

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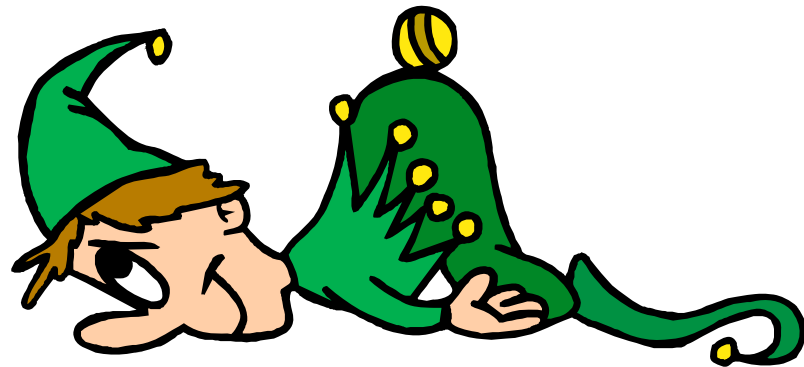
(OR HOW TO STAY ON YOUR FEET)



## A fall is...

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- An unintentional event that results in an individual coming to rest on the ground or on another lower level.





## Falls lead to nursing home placement.

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- In a study by Wheelock, et al. in 2003, motor impairments with frequent falls were the leading predictor of nursing home placement in HD.

# Causes of Falls

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- WEAKNESS
- POOR BALANCE
- MEDICATIONS
- FATIGUE
- PERCEPTUAL IMPAIRMENTS





# WEAKNESS

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- HIP, KNEE AND ANKLE MUSCLES ALL AFFECT BALANCE
- A GREAT DEAL OF STRENGTH IS LOST WITH INACTIVITY

# POOR BALANCE

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- DECREASED REACTION TIME
- DECREASED COORDINATION OF MOVEMENT
- DECREASED SPEED OF MOVEMENT
- DECREASED ABILITY TO DO TWO THINGS AT ONCE







# MEDICATIONS

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- 4 OR MORE MEDICATIONS INCREASE FALL RISK
- SIDE EFFECTS INCLUDE: LOW BLOOD PRESSURE, DIZZINESS, DROWSINESS, AND UNSTEADINESS

# FATIGUE

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- FATIGUE IN HD IS UNDERESTIMATED
- MUSCLE FATIGUE IS NOT ALWAYS RECOGNIZED



# PERCEPTUAL IMPAIRMENTS

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- DIFFICULTY VISUALLY SCANNING
- DEPTH PERCEPTION PROBLEMS
- IMPAIRED VISUAL ACUITY
- DARK ADAPTATION





## WHAT YOU CAN DO...

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- **EXERCISE** to improve strength, balance and endurance
- Monitor **MEDICATIONS** to minimize side effects
- Preserve **VISION** : wear glasses if needed, increase lighting
- **REST** muscles...take frequent breaks



# SAFETY AT HOME

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- Clean up clutter
- Limit furniture and obstacles
- Take up throw rugs
- Limit stair climbing
- Turn on lights



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- Program phones for emergencies
  - Turn down the water heater
  - Install door alarms
  - and keyless entry

# Bathroom

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- Shower Seat
- Grab bars
- Non-slip mats
- Hand-held Shower Hose



# Kitchen

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- Move items to counter height
- Lock cabinets holding chemicals
- Remove knobs from stove
- Use plastic and disposable products





# Energy Conservation and Work Simplification

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- Take rest breaks between activity
- Plan ahead, use a schedule
- Set priorities
- Break down tasks into smaller steps





## REFERENCES

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- Wheelock, V.L. et al. Predictors of nursing home placement in Huntington's disease. *Neurology* 2003; 998-1001
- Tinetti M. Risk factors for falls among elderly persons living in the community. *NEJM* 1988. 1701-1706