



Situational Safety: Preventing Falls on Stairways

One in three elderly patients suffer a fall each year¹. Falls occurring on stairs can result in broken bones, severe bruising, cuts, or worse, therefore stairs present a serious hazard for many older adults. Patients taking warfarin, who are particularly vulnerable in the event of one of these injuries, need to practice extra care in order to prevent stair-related falls.

Falls going up or down stairs happen for many reasons. Most of these can be avoided. The following 'steps' may help avoid a dangerous fall on stairs:

- Clear stairways of any toys, shoes, laundry, groceries, or clutter
- Keep stairs dry
- Make sure shoes are dry and free of leaves or paper
- Do not walk up or down stairs wearing socks or stockings
- Use handrails all the way up or down the stairs
- Always remove reading glasses before using stairs
- Take it slowly, one step at a time
- Use over-head lights or nightlights to light the stairway
- Wear shoes (bare feet become dry/slippery in low humidity)
- Place entire foot on the step, toward the back of the step
- Avoid stairs when light-headed, dizzy, or fatigued

Walking up or down stairs is tiring and is considered strenuous exercise. Legs can tire quickly and give out without warning. Falls can occur going upstairs when patients misjudge the distance of the first step. Falls can occur going downstairs, toward the bottom, when the patient's legs fatigue. Patients should never hesitate to ask for help when using the stairs.

By following the helpful tips above, many stair-related falls can be avoided. Because 2-10% of falls result in head trauma¹, warfarin patients need to use special safety precautions and maintain their regular INR monitoring schedule. All falls should be reported to the patient's healthcare team, regardless of how minor it may have seemed.

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1 Garwood, C. (2008, April). Use of anticoagulation in elderly patients with atrial fibrillation who are at risk of falling. *The Annals of Pharmacotherapy*, (42)