



## Healthy Steps for Older Adults | [aging.pa.gov/wellness](https://aging.pa.gov/wellness)

### Program Synopsis

- **General Description**

Healthy Steps for Older Adults was developed by the Fall Prevention Initiative of the Pennsylvania Department of Aging, and is an evidence-based falls prevention program for adults ages 50 and over. The program is designed to raise participants' knowledge and awareness, introduce steps they can take to reduce falls and improve their health and well-being, and provide referrals and resources. Healthy Steps for Older Adults is a unique, comprehensive, community-based falls prevention program.

Healthy Steps for Older Adults addresses many common causes of falls:

- Environmental safety
- Balance, strength, flexibility, and endurance exercises
- Nutrition
- Foot health
- Sensory deficits (vision/hearing)
- Side effects of medication
- Health status/disease states, including substance use
- The need to maintain an active lifestyle
- Social connectedness
- Mental and spiritual well-being

- **Program Goal**

The goal of the Healthy Steps for Older Adults program is to prevent falls, promote health and ensure that older adults can remain as independent as possible for as long as possible. Healthy Steps for Older Adults provides a participant guide based on research and best practices in health communication, health literacy, and adult learning.

Healthy Steps for Older Adults is designed to:

- Be fun, sociable, and validating.
- Raise awareness of the causes of falls.
- Learn how falls can be prevented.
- Provide opportunities and ideas for physical activities.
- Identify and problem-solve barriers to change.
- Provide home activities that reinforce what is learned.
- Include frequent breaks and activity changes.

- **Essential Components and Activities**

Physical Skills Screening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Welcome</li><li>○ Get Up and Go</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sit to Stand</li> <li>○ One Leg Stand</li> <li>○ Referrals and Follow-Up</li> </ul>
<b>Registration Questionnaire</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Welcome</li> <li>○ Registration Questionnaire</li> <li>○ Referrals and Follow-Up</li> </ul>
<b>Workshop 1: You Can Prevent Falls</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Welcome and Overview</li> <li>○ Wiggle Break</li> <li>○ Home Safety</li> <li>○ Talking With Your Doctor</li> <li>○ Medicine Safety</li> <li>○ Fall Action Plan</li> <li>○ Next Steps</li> </ul>
<b>Workshop 2: Staying Active</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Welcome and Overview</li> <li>○ Physical Skills Screening</li> <li>○ Discussion: Daily/Weekly Activities</li> <li>○ Getting Started with Exercise</li> <li>○ Foot Care and Foot Wear</li> <li>○ Warm-Ups</li> <li>○ Balance Basics</li> <li>○ Strength and Energy, Weights, Stretching</li> <li>○ A Day in the Life</li> <li>○ Next Steps &amp; Workshop Evaluation</li> </ul>

- **Program Design and Elements**

Healthy Steps for Older Adults is designed to work for participants with low health literacy. Health literacy is the ability to read, understand, and act on health information. Older adults are more likely to have limited literacy skills than middle-aged or younger adults. Low health literacy skills lead to longer hospital stays, more emergency room visits, and more medication use. Changes in our health care system and new terms and concepts in health care have increased the problem of low health literacy.

The Healthy Steps for Older Adults Guide has easy-to-read language and pictures. The exercises described in the guide are demonstrated and practiced in the workshops. Discussions and exercises help participants relate the information in the guide to their own lives.

- **Target Population**

Older adults ages 50 and up.

- **Length of the Program**

Healthy Steps for Older Adults consists of two workshops lasting approximately two hours each. Both workshops can be held in one day or over a two day period.

- **Recommended Class Size**

The size of a Healthy Steps for Older Adults class is dependent on the available space for participants to conduct three activities as part of the workshops. These activities include, signing in, sitting in small groups or around tables, and a physical skills screening. The Physical skills screening station requires a 6' x 8' area next to a sturdy wall and, ideally, in a corner. Chairs should be arranged so that they can be easily moved to form pairs or small groups, or so participants can stand and do exercises. Consideration for space should include people who use walkers, wheelchairs and other aids.

- **Desired Outcomes**

The objectives of the Healthy Steps for Older Adults program are:

- To create a comfortable, welcoming atmosphere.
- To increase participants' awareness and understanding of their own fall risks, and how they compare to other older adults.
- To increase participants' understanding of the fall hazards at home.
- To show participants simple changes for safety they can do at home.
- To increase participants' understanding of health-related fall risks, such as poor diet, alcohol use, medicine side effects, incontinence, and osteoporosis.
- To increase participants' skills for talking with their health care provider(s).
- To provide follow-up help for those who need/want services.

Referral and follow-up are an important part of the Healthy Steps for Older Adults program. Participants will be referred to appropriate health care providers, other professionals, and community resources. Referrals will address both information and interventions to reduce the risk factors for falls. Healthy Steps for Older Adults Facilitators will make sure that there is follow-up on referrals.

- **Measures and Evaluation Activities, e.g., Fidelity Checks**

At the conclusion of the Healthy Steps for Older Adults workshop, participants complete a Workshop Evaluation Questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed to provide the workshop leader and the Pennsylvania Department of Aging feedback on the educational and physical benefits that the participant received from attending the workshop. Four to six weeks after the program, all participants are contacted and interviewed as a follow-up to measure the outcomes of the program in their lives. In addition, the Pennsylvania Department of Aging maintains a contract through the Pennsylvania Association for Area Agencies on Aging to conduct workshop leader fidelity monitoring.

## **Health Outcomes and Supporting Evidence**

The Healthy Steps for Older Adults falls prevention program underwent an evidence-based research study conducted through the Department of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences, Graduate School of Public Health, University of Pittsburgh under the direction of Steven M. Albert, PhD. Findings of this study were submitted to the Administration for Community Living following the Aging and Disability Evidence-based Programs and Practices process. Healthy Steps for Older Adults received evidence-based status through the Administration for Community Living in October 2015.

The major finding from the Healthy Steps for Older Adults evidence-based research study was the reduction in falls incidence associated with program participation. Older adults who completed the Healthy Steps for Older Adults program workshops had a

significantly lower incidence of falls relative to a comparator group ascertained at the same sites who were otherwise similar in fall risk. In multivariate models, Healthy Steps for Older Adults reduced falls incidence by about 15%.

### **Program Costs**

Healthy Steps for Older Adults workshops are offered to older adults ages 50 and up at no charge through Pennsylvania's 52 Area Agencies on Aging. Other organizations and facilities outside of Pennsylvania's Area Agencies on Aging network can purchase a license to train Healthy Steps for Older Adults Workshop Leaders and to conduct Healthy Steps for Older Adults workshops. For information on the Healthy Steps for Older Adults program licensing costs or for additional information about the program please email [wellness@pa.gov](mailto:wellness@pa.gov).

### **Program Savings**

As published in *The American Journal of Managed Care*® VOL. 22, NO. 10, October 2016:

*“Over 12 months of follow-up, 11.3% of the HSOA (Healthy Steps for Older Adults) arm and 14.8% of the comparison group experienced 1 or more hospitalizations [P= .04]. HSOA participants had less hospital care when matched for falls status. Observed values suggest expected costs per participant of \$3013 in the HSOA arm and \$3853 in the comparison condition, an average savings of \$840 per person. Results were confirmed in Monte Carlo simulations [\$3164 vs \$3882, savings of \$718]. The savings of \$718 to \$840 per person is comparable to reports from other falls prevention economic evaluations. The advantages of HSOA include its statewide reach and integration with county aging services.”*

### **Resource Requirements**

- **Facilities**

General site requirements

- Handicapped accessible
- Parking nearby
- Ideally, near public transportation or in an area where many older adults live
- Telephone
- Restrooms
- Good heating and ventilation
- Room to move about for people who use walkers, wheelchairs, and other aids
- Space for 3 activities:
  - Signing in.
  - Sitting in small groups or around a table.
  - Physical screening/exercise activities. Each physical screening station requires a 6' x 8' area next to a sturdy wall and, ideally, in a corner.

Floor surface

As long as you have enough spotters, any normal floor surface, without carpet or with flat-pile carpet, should be satisfactory.

- Avoid deep pile carpeting.
- Remove area rugs, which can move, bunch, or curl and cause falls.
- Make sure the floors are not slippery or recently waxed.

- **Equipment and Materials**

Materials for Workshop 1

- Registration Questionnaire
- Attendance List
- Guides for participants
- Mrs. Lucky's Reservations
- Dr. Says Patient Says
- Bingo Cards (collect and re-use) and Bingo Questions
- Home Safety Checklist
- Referral Forms
- Community resource materials
- Name tags
- Extra pens and pencils
- Optional: decorations, food, serving utensils, napkins, etc.

Materials for Workshop 2

- Attendance List
- Guides for participants (participants should bring their Guide back)
- Referral Forms
- Workshop Evaluation Forms
- Community resource materials
- Name tags
- Extra pens and pencils
- Optional: decorations, food, serving utensils, napkins, etc.

## **Training Requirements**

- **Instructors/leaders**

- Healthy Steps for Older Adults Workshop Leaders are required to take three online courses prior to attending a two day classroom training. The online courses are approximately 45 minutes each in length and the two day workshop runs approximately 6.5 hours each day.
- Healthy Steps for Older Adults Workshop Leader Program Manual
- Healthy Steps for Older Adults Workshop Participant Guide

- **Instructor Certification Required? Yes**

- **Instructor qualifications**

- Good communication and interpersonal skills
- Enthusiasm, dependability
- Interest in working with older adults
- Ability to perform range of motion and low-level endurance exercises

- **Number of instructors required per class**

- One or two based on class size plus spotters to assist participants.

## **Contributors**

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The Healthy Steps for Older Adults Guide is produced by the University of California, Berkeley, in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Aging and many older adults.

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