



Medications that increase the risk of falls

Several classes of medications can increase the risk of falling for different reasons. Any time cognitive function or the level of consciousness is impaired, there is an increased risk of falling. The benefits of the medication vs the risk should always be considered and discussed with a provider. Medications should not be stopped abruptly without consulting a provider. In some cases, the condition the medication is treating can also increase the risk of falls. Understanding how to manage the risks and what to look out for can help mitigate risk.

Psychotropic Drugs

1. Benzodiazepines and sedative-hypnotics

These medications are used for anxiety and sleep. They can cause cognitive impairment, grogginess, unsteady gait, and delirium which can all increase the risk of falling. Taking the lowest effective dose, tapering down when able, and not combining these medications with other medications that can impair cognitive function are some ways to help mitigate risk.

2. Antipsychotics

These medications can cause side effects such as syncope, sedation, slowed reflexes and loss of balance. Taking these medications at bedtime, being aware of the possible side effects and knowing your limits before performing new tasks can help reduce risk.

3. Antidepressants

These medications can cause low sodium levels which in turn can cause gait disturbances. Following up with a provider and checking labs can help catch sodium levels that could be problematic. Some antidepressants can also cause sedation, impair balance, reduce reaction times or cause orthostatic hypotension (a sudden drop in blood pressure that can lead to lightheadedness, dizziness or fainting. This usually occurs when standing up

too fast). Use the lowest effective dose and try to avoid combining with other medications known to increase fall risk.

Anticholinergic medications

These medications can be used to treat allergies, anxiety/depression, insomnia, overactive bladder etc. They can increase confusion, cognitive impairment, delirium, dry mouth etc and can increase fall potential when over used or used in combination with other sedating medications.

Cardiovascular medications

Any drug that lowers blood pressure or heart rate can result in hypotension (when blood pressure drops too low). This can cause fainting, lightheadedness, muscle weakness, or blurred vision. Monitoring blood pressure, taking certain blood pressure medications at night, and standing slowly are all ways to reduce fall risk. Diuretics can also cause dehydration which increases the risk of low blood pressure. Staying hydrated can help decrease the risk of falls.

Diabetes medications

These medications aim to lower blood sugar. If blood sugar gets too low, it can cause lightheadedness, confusion, dizziness or blurred vision. Monitoring blood sugar carefully and taking medications as prescribed can reduce the risk of blood sugar dropping too low and causing unwanted side effects.