**Street Safety for Seniors – Posted 24 March 2024**

<https://www.selectcarenyc.com/street-safety-for-seniors/>



New York City’s walkability and public transit networks are two major factors that make it an incredible location for those who wish to age-in-place.

While the city’s density of hospitals, community centers, and groceries make staying engaged in the community easier than more car-dependent locales, traffic accidents still present a significant hazard to older adults. In fact, a recent [NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene study](https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/epi/databrief68.pdf) found that pedestrians 65 and older were three times more likely to be fatally injured than adults between 18 and 64 due to traffic collisions, despite traffic calming measures like the now 10-year-old [Vision Zero initiative](https://www.nyc.gov/content/visionzero/pages/).

With spring weather just around the corner, now is the time to brush up on strategies you can use to remain safe while traveling in your community.

1. **Know your body:** Our normal walking pace, sense of balance, stamina, vision, and hearing all change with age, and knowing our individual capabilities is key to making good choices in the street. If you have not been active during the colder months, consider taking a “test walk” around your block to get a sense for these factors.

Make sure you are staying on top of your regular [medical screenings](https://www.selectcarenyc.com/medicare-tips-how-to-stay-healthy-with-preventative-services/), consider taking a [fall risk assessment](https://www.selectcarenyc.com/what-to-expect-during-a-fall-risk-assessment/), and check in on your [podiatric health](https://www.selectcarenyc.com/foot-care-for-seniors/) to ensure you are putting your best foot forward.

Finally, when planning a walking trip, try to time them for the point in the day when you feel most energetic and alert. We are more prone to making mistakes when we are tired, so picking the right time of day and limiting walking distances to those you can manage are key to safety.

1. **Stretch:** Limbering up before a walk can not only lower your risk of falls, but prevent muscle injuries if you need to make a sudden movement, like stepping back from a curb.

You should always follow your doctor’s advice when it comes to stretching and physical activity, but if you are under no specific doctor’s orders, try the following:

First, sit in a chair, raise your feet slightly and gently rotate your feet at the ankles, making small circles. Next, gently bend one leg at a time at the knee. Finally, stand up and slowly bend at the waist to help stretch your back.

1. **Dress for safety:** Taking an extra moment to assess your clothing and shoes can go a long way towards helping you reach your destination safely.

Pick a pair of comfortable socks and shoes, avoiding backless or slip-on shoes that can come loose at inopportune times. Read up on [shoe selection tips](https://www.selectcarenyc.com/helpful-tips-keep-feet/) here.

Consider the weather and time of day. Bring water and a hat if high temperatures are expected, and an umbrella or rain jacket on wet days.

While much of the city is extremely well-lit, there are darker stretches of sidewalk in every borough and streetlights may be out on a given corner. To promote visibility, try to avoid darker clothing at night, opting for brighter, or even reflective items. If you use a wheelchair or similar mobility device, consider running an orange flag on a pole so road users have an easier time seeing you from behind stationary vehicles.

1. **Pace yourself:** Even on quick trips to the store, it is critical to listen to your body and take breaks as needed.

If you plan on walking up a steep incline or feel a little winded after a long stretch of green lights, finding a stoop, bus stop, bench or other temporary seat can mean the difference between a pleasant stroll and a tiring hike.

1. **Plan safe routes:** While it always helps to watch where you walk, getting into the habit of finding pedestrian friendly streets with smooth, even paving, angled curb cuts and limited obstructions can really pay off in the long run.

Even if it adds an extra block or two to your walks, favoring well-maintained, safer sidewalks lower your risk of falling or twisting an ankle significantly.

When looking for an ideal walking route, especially for longer trips, try to plan a path that gives you periodic access to bust stops or subway access. That way, you have an easy off ramp should you become to fatigued to continue traveling safely.

Finally, consider the length of street crossings on your planned route. When possible, consider crossing major avenues along smaller side streets with only one traffic direction, as this lowers the number of points where vehicles can intersect your path.

1. **Take care at intersections:** Intersections and street crossings are the scene of more dangerous crashes, collisions, and falls than any other part of the New York City streetscape, so particular care should be taken at crossings.
* If you reach a large intersection while there is already a walk signal active,consider waiting  for a brand new green light signal before crossing to give yourself as much time as possible.
* Even if you have the light, it is critical that you look both ways and decide for yourself whether or not it is safe to cross.
* Do not follow the lead of other pedestrians, as they may have failed to scan for vehicles, or might plan to dash across the street faster than you can safely travel.
* When waiting for the light, stand on the curb, rather than in the street, as this will help protect you from turning vehicles, especially busses and trucks with wider turning angles.
* Listen for sirens, loud engines or other signs of fast-moving traffic before attempting to cross. If you think a driver is moving too quickly or expect an emergency vehicle is nearby, consider waiting until the vehicle is past your position before crossing.

With these tips in mind, SelectCare wishes everyone in our community a happy, safe and active Spring season!

If you or a loved one are having trouble remaining engaged in your community or missing out on experiences due to limited mobility, balance, or changes in your hearing or sight, now might be the time to [contact SelectCare](https://www.selectcarenyc.com/contact-us/) and learn how our team of home health care experts have helped New Yorkers live happier, healthier lives since 1985.

To learn more about our services, [receive a free in-home care guide](https://www.selectcarenyc.com/request-our-free-home-care-guide/) or [read testimonials](https://www.selectcarenyc.com/testimonials-and-reviews/) from members of the SelectCare community.