

Fall Prevention in Late Life

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Why Fall Prevention Matters

Falling is a major public health concern for older adults. One in 3 adults aged 65+ and 1 in 2 adults aged 80+ fall each year, often suffering major changes to health and quality of life. Unintentional falls and traumatic brain injuries result in significant morbidity and mortality; falls, in fact, are the leading cause of hospital admission and injury-related death in older adults.

Reduction of fall risk is associated with improved physical and emotional well-being for aging adults, and risk minimization has the potential to enhance overall, long-term quality of life.

Residents of long-term care facilities are at greater risk of falling than community-dwelling older adults, but both populations face significant fall risk. The specific fall prevention measures highlighted below are essential to reduce fall-related injury and mortality, as well as the high medical costs associated with falls in late life.

Strategies for Prevention: Be Proactive in Reducing Your Risk

Talk to your healthcare provider regularly about potential side effects and interactions of your medications, especially if you take 3 or more prescriptions.

Psychoactive medications often contribute to fall risk:

- Benzodiazepines (e.g., Valium, Ativan, Xanax)
- Antidepressants (e.g., Elavil, Wellbutrin, Prozac, Paxil)
- Sedatives and hypnotics (e.g., Ambien, Sonata, Zolpidem)

Adverse side effects of medications that can increase fall risk:

- Dizziness and confusion
- Fatigue
- Balance and mobility problems

Increase your participation in physical activity and exercise.

Recommended activities include:

- Tai Chi
- Strengthening of lower body muscles
- Activities that focus on improved balance and mobility
- Exercises designed to improve performance of activities of daily living (ADLs)

Strategies for Prevention (continued)

Be aware of your surroundings and potential environmental hazards:

- Slippery or uneven surfaces
- Stairways
- Low lighting
- Footwear (e.g., slippery soles; slip-on shoes; ill-fitting shoes; walking indoors in socks)
- Incorrect bed height
- Improperly fitted or maintained walkers or wheelchairs
- Congested or crowded areas

Remove unnecessary objects to help you move safely between spaces in your home environment:

- Loose rugs
- Cords
- Unstable furniture or railings
- Household clutter

Add supportive features to help you move safely between spaces in your home environment and securely complete daily activities:

- Grab bars
- Handrails
- Places to sit and rest throughout your home
- Stable toilet and shower seats at appropriate heights

Recognize feelings of fear and anxiety related to falling:

- Talk with your healthcare provider about how to modify your fear of falling; discuss behavioral risks
- Ask for help when a situation feels unsafe
- Talk to your family and friends about how they can best provide support
- Don't let a fear of falling unnecessarily restrict your physical or social activities; exaggerated fears can lead to reduced functional abilities or social isolation

Internet Resources:

For more information on risks of falling and fall prevention, visit the following websites. Type the term "fall" into the search box at each site to access information.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov>

National Council on Aging
<http://www.ncoa.org>

National Institutes of Health
<http://www.nihseniorhealth.gov>

National Institute on Aging
<http://www.nia.nih.gov>