

## Overview:

# Risk of Falling and Older Adults

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**Falls are a major public health concern for older adults.** Annually, 1 out of 3 Americans aged 65+ experiences a fall. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, falls are the leading cause of hospitalization for trauma and the leading cause of injury death for aging adults<sup>1</sup>. Falls are also associated with numerous physical and psychological health conditions, decreased quality of life, and high health care costs.

## Risk Factors

### Physical Changes:

- Chronic health conditions
- Cognitive decline (dementia)
- Osteoporosis and osteoarthritis
- Gait and balance problems
- Impaired vision and hearing
- Confusion and dizziness
- Depression

### Lifestyle Factors:

- History of falls
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Activities of daily living (ADL) limitations
- Use of multiple medications
- Adverse side effects of medication
- Fear of falling

### Environmental Hazards:

- Physical obstacles such as loose rugs or cords
- Slippery or uneven surfaces (i.e. change from tile to carpet)
- Improper shoes (i.e. slick bottom, raised heel)
- Poor lighting
- Lack of supportive household features (i.e. grab bars, hand rails)
- Poor or incorrect use, fit, or maintenance of assistive devices (i.e. walkers, wheelchairs)
- Congested or crowded areas

## Fall Statistics

- One out of three Americans experiences a fall each year<sup>1-3</sup>
- 2.3 million fall related injuries occurred in 2011<sup>1 2</sup>
- Every 15 seconds, an adult is treated in the E.R. for a fall<sup>1</sup>
- \$16-19 billion per year in medical costs for non-fatal fall injuries<sup>4</sup>
- As many as 3 out of 4 homecare facility residents fall each year, which is twice the rate of falls for community dwelling older adults<sup>1</sup>
- Every 29 minutes, an adult dies from a fall<sup>2</sup>
- Falls are the leading cause of death<sup>1-3</sup>

## References:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012). Falls among older adults: An overview. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/adultfalls.html>
2. National Council on Aging. (2012). Fall prevention: Fact sheet. Retrieved from <http://www.ncoa.org/press-room/fact-sheets/falls-prevention-fact-sheet.html>
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4. Stevens, J. A., Corso, P. S., Finkelstein, E. A., & Miller, T. R. (2006). The costs of fatal and non-fatal falls among older adults. *Injury Prevention, 12*(5), 290-295. doi: 10.1136/ip.2005.011015