

Professional Caregivers:

What You Can Do to Prevent Falls in Older Adults

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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; in fact, falls 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.

Risk Factors Associated with Falls

Health Risks

- Gait and balance problems
- Frail bones and joints
- Osteoporosis and osteoarthritis
- Pain
- Poor vision and hearing
- Cognitive decline (dementia)
- Depression and anxiety
- Confusion and dizziness

Lifestyle Factors:

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

Environmental Hazards:

- Clutter on the floor (e.g., loose rugs, cords)
- Slippery or uneven surfaces
- Footwear (e.g., slippery soles; slip-on shoes; ill-fitting shoes; walking indoors in socks)
- Low lighting
- No grab bars or hand rails
- Poor or incorrect use, fit, or maintenance of assistive devices (i.e. walkers, wheelchairs)
- Congested or crowded areas

Strategies for Prevention: Be Proactive to Reduce Patient Risk

Reducing fall risk is essential to improving the wellbeing of older adults. As a professional healthcare provider, your role is to bridge the gap between research and practice in this area. Implementing the recommendations below will increase your and your professional team's success in patient fall prevention and likely improve the long term health outcomes and quality of life of the older adults for whom you provide care.

- ❑ **Educate the entire healthcare team as well as the patient about fall risk reduction**
 - Inform your entire health care team and your older adult patients about effective strategies to modify behaviors that may increase fall risk, as well as environmental factors that can be modified to reduce risk
 - Address attitudes and perceptions of older adults and staff; increase awareness of fall risks, but also highlight the danger of an exaggerated fear of falling (FOF) that might lead to overly restricted activity, functional limitations or social isolation for patients

- ❑ **Establish a management team to oversee the implementation of fall prevention**
 - Start small with simple interventions and continue to monitor the effectiveness of the program
 - Be flexible and willing to change your approach in order to address the needs of your specific healthcare setting
 - Strive for sustainability with a multidisciplinary approach; share fall-related patient information with all members of the health care team

- ❑ **Individualize fall prevention strategies for each patient**
 - Approach each situation with consideration of fall risk factors that include physical changes, lifestyle factors, and environmental hazards
 - Monitor all residents for fall risk, but pay closest attention to individuals with multiple risk factors present
 - Review medications regularly
 - Have all patients engage in physical activities to improve strength, balance and mobility
 - Modify environmental surroundings
 - Incorporate best practices and recommendations that address the complexity of each patient's health and social situation; consider safety measures in the context of desired physical and social activities

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