

## Easy does it! – Prevention of Falls

Falls can happen to any age group, however, the number of falls and the severity increase with the age of the individual. Falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries in people 65 and older. Injuries can include head injuries, upper extremity fractures (wrist, forearm, shoulder,) spine and hip fractures.

Women are especially susceptible to hip fractures as a result of decreasing bone strength that occurs after menopause. Most hip fractures require hospitalization, surgery and extended rehabilitation. Approximately 25% of hip fractures will make a full recovery while 40% will require nursing home admission. 50% will be dependent upon a cane or walker. 20% will die within one year of the fall. Clearly, falls can be a major life changing event that can rob an elderly person of their independence.

Fall prevention is a necessity as the individual ages. Many falls can be prevented by simple home improvements. These can include: Wearing properly fitted shoes with non-skid soles, avoiding high heels, tying shoe laces, never walking in stocking feet, installing nightlights, removing throw rugs, removing clutter from floors and stairs, installing handrails on both sides of the stairway, installing grab bars on bathroom walls, cleaning up spills immediately and never standing on chairs and boxes.

Medical conditions can put someone at higher risk for a fall and weakened bones. Aging affects eyesight, balance, strength and reflexes. Exercise programs can improve strength, balance coordination and bone strength. One should talk with his or her provider before starting an exercise program. In addition, check with your provider about potential side effects with replication and over the counter drugs, such as drowsiness and dizziness. Yearly medical examination should include eye exam and a physical that includes evaluation for cardiac and blood pressure problems. Ask your medical provider if you need a bone density test. There are medications that slow bone loss and increase bone strength.

Nutrition and lifestyle choices can also affect fall risk and bone strength. One should maintain a diet with adequate calcium and Vitamin D. Smoking and excessive alcohol use decrease bone strength. Alcohol can also cause unsteadiness and slow reaction times. Recommendations include smoking cessation and avoidance of excessive alcohol intake.

If you do fall, determine if you are hurt. Slide or crawl to the nearest chair or couch and try to get up. If you are hurt or cannot get up, call out for help from relatives or dial 9-1-1 for immediate help.



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