

Falls Prevention Awareness

During the month of September, we take a week to recognize falls, fall prevention efforts, and to bring general awareness to this topic. This week of recognition aspires to help in the prevention of fall-related injuries among the older adult population. Falls, although common and costly, do not have to be a natural part of the aging process or something we should learn to accept as we grow older.

According to the National Institute on Aging (NIA), more than 1 in 3 people age 65 and older fall each year. The risk of falling, as well as fall-related problems, rises with age. What may cause our risk to increase involves our eyesight, hearing, and reflexes that can become impaired during the aging process. Further, our risk of chronic conditions increases and thus, our need for medication may as well. We also typically become less physically active as we age. All of these factors can set us up for a fall if we don't take the necessary steps to reduce any potential fall risk.

Another major concern about falls is the monetary strain they can cause to an individual and family. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stated that in 2015, total medical costs for falls totaled more than \$50 billion. Because the U.S. population is aging, both the number of falls and the costs to treat falls and fall-related injuries are likely to rise. "Over 800,000 patients a year are hospitalized because of a fall-related injury, most often because of a head injury or hip fracture. Fall injuries are among the 20 most expensive medical conditions, with the average hospital cost for a fall injury totaling over \$30,000." (CDC, 2015)

While we know that falls are unfortunately common and costly, the fear of falling among older individuals is quite common as well. The NIA notes that the fear of falling in individuals becomes more common as people age, even among those who have not yet experienced a fall. This fear may lead older people to avoid activities such as walking, shopping, or taking part in social activities they enjoy. When we choose to stay inside instead of participating in social activities or stop being physically active due to the fear of a fall, this action can have a negative effect on both our physical and mental health. This concern can also become a self-fulfilling prophecy – we stay in due to the fear that we might experience a fall, and thus, become weaker physically. When we do decide to attend a social activity, we are at a greater risk for a fall due to the limited amount of physical activity we have experienced.

The good news is that there are simple ways to prevent most falls. Staying physically active, having your hearing and vision checked on a regular basis, and making sure that your shoes are sturdy with a low heel and fit comfortably are several things you can do to prevent a fall. In addition, have canes, walkers, and other assistive devices checked for proper height and fit, ensure you are getting enough sleep, and make sure you understand the side effects of your prescriptions. Many medications can cause dizziness, so it is important to talk to your doctor and pharmacist about the side effects of the medications you are taking, and if they put you at an increased risk for a fall.

Therefore, the best thing that we can do for ourselves is to not let the fear of falling keep us from being active. Overcoming this fear can help us maintain or increase our physical activity levels, improve mental and social health, and prevent future falls. Doing activities we enjoy, such as getting together with friends, gardening, and walking can help us stay healthy, enhance mood, as well as reduce our risk of a fall or fall-related injury.

REFERENCES:

<https://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/adultfalls.html>

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/prevent-falls-and-fractures>