



How To Prevent Falls and Fractures in the Older Adult

A fall can be the beginning of a downward spiral for an older adult. A bone fracture in an older person often requires hospitalization and rehabilitation which may make the person vulnerable to pneumonia and other illnesses. We have all had clients who have had a serious fracture and were not able to come home again. This issue is dedicated to preventing falls and fractures.

What Causes Falling?

The aging process results in changes in eyesight, hearing, muscle strength and reflexes, as well as reaction time. All of these sensory and physical changes can contribute to an increase in falling.

There are also medical conditions that contribute to a loss of balance, most notably diabetes and vascular conditions which result in a loss of feeling or numbness in legs or feet. Heart and blood pressure issues can result in dizziness and fainting. Certain neurological diseases that affect gait and balance such as Parkinson's can increase falling. Poor posture due to osteoporosis, diseases of the nervous system or inactivity also increases the likelihood of falls. In addition, multiple medications may interact to cause dizziness or balance issues.

The aging process and its accompanying conditions and treatments make the older adult vulnerable to falling. Falls are generally the result of multiple factors such as medical conditions and environmental impediments.

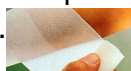
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Personal Behavior Changes:

- Have regular check-ups for vision and hearing. It is important to be evaluated for cataracts, macular degeneration and glaucoma. Wear hearing aids and glasses that fit properly, and remember to check hearing aid batteries.

- Consult your doctor or pharmacist about the side effects of medications, and indicate your concern about falling.



- Limit alcohol consumption. Even a small amount can affect your balance and reflexes.
- Don't get up quickly after eating, lying down or resting. Low blood pressure may cause dizziness at these times.

- If walking is unsteady or there are complaints of feeling dizzy, use a cane, walking stick or walker to help stay balanced. This is very important on uneven or unfamiliar ground. Use special care when walking outdoors on wet and icy sidewalks.

- Don't wear smooth soled shoes or socks. Wear rubber-soled and low heeled shoes that fully support the feet. The fear of falling is a recognized risk factor because it leads to inactivity and a loss of confidence, which can become insidious. Remain engaged in leisure time physical activity to keep muscle tone and strength.

Environmental Changes:

It is often easier to make environmental changes than it is to have an impact on behavior or lifestyle changes. Here are some easily addressed environmental modifications:

- Check Floors and Carpeting
 - Remove throw rugs and runners
 - Secure carpeting on stairs and keep stairs free from clutter
 - For large rugs apply double faced adhesive carpet tape or rubber matting to the back
 - Avoid highly waxed floors
- Kitchen Safety
 - Purchase a step stool with high and strong handrails
 - Utilize assistive devices such as long handled reacher, tongs.
 - Roll up sleeves and adjust clothing to prevent a fire hazard
- Bathroom Safety
 - Have grab bars installed to the shower or tub wall and next to the toilet. Water temperature should not be more than 120 degrees, test with hand before entering bath or shower.
 - For bathing, use a hand held shower hose and bath seat in the tub or shower
 - Use a raised toilet seat or toilet safety frame for toileting.
- Check Electrical Outlets / Wires and Lighting
 - Avoid numerous wires on the floor
 - Do not place electrical cords under the rugs
 - Make sure lighting is adequate in needed areas; night lights for bed rooms and bathrooms are helpful.

We can work together with older adults to reduce the number of falls by addressing personal behavior and environmental safety. Addressing these factors can increase independence and longevity for the older adult, which in turn provides a sense of well being and a life well lived.