



Wellness News Network™

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Fall Prevention in Older Adults

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Introduction

Falls are a common and often serious health event among older adults and may lead to moderate or severe injuries, depending on the cause. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 33 percent of adults age 65 and older fall every year, and falls are the No. 1 cause of injury-related deaths in this age group.¹ Falls are also the leading cause of nonfatal injuries and hospital admissions in older individuals. Fractures, dislocations, soft tissue injuries and head wounds are among the most common fall-related injuries, notes an article published in the journal *Clinics in Geriatric Medicine*.² Falls occur for many different reasons and the best way to prevent falls is to take the proactive steps we discuss in this edition of the Wellness News Network. Your chiropractor is an expert in fall prevention and can counsel you on the best possible activities to reduce your likelihood of falling.

Causes of Falls in Older Adults

Elderly individuals are more likely to fall if they possess or encounter one or more fall-inducing risk factors.

A study published in the medical journal *American Family Physician* states that the following are all possible causes of or contributors to falls in older individuals: environmental hazards, accidents, balance disorders, arthritis-related pain, certain medications, acute illness, visual disorders, central nervous system disorders, cognitive impairment and postural hypotension (i.e., the lightheaded feeling that occurs after shifting from a lying to a sitting or standing position).³ Osteoporosis, insufficient physical activity, and various indoor and outdoor hazards may be the most significant factors causing falls in the elderly.

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a health condition characterized by bones that become increasingly porous, which means that the bones of an affected individual are less resistant to stress and more likely to fracture - a particularly common occurrence among women with this problem. Hormonal changes, vitamin D and calcium deficiency and reduced physical activity are the most significant causes of osteoporosis.

QUESTION:

What are some of the more common reasons for falls? in older adults

- A) balance disorders
- B) visual disorders
- C) environmental hazards
- D) all of the above

ANSWER:

D) all of the above

TRUE OR FALSE:

Osteoporosis is more common in men than women.

ANSWER:

False

QUESTION:

What percentage of adults age 65 and over fall every year?

- A) 25%
- B) 45%
- C) 35%

ANSWER:

C) 35%

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In some cases, brittle bones may fracture after a fall occurs, while in other cases a bone - especially a hip bone - may break when stressed and cause the fall.

Some of the best ways to prevent osteoporosis, and osteoporosis-related falls, include consuming adequate calcium-containing foods or beverages such as milk, cheese, yogurt, fish, broccoli, collards or almonds, as well as getting a sufficient amount of vitamin D and performing regular bouts of weight-bearing activity. A 2007 study published in the journal *Osteoporosis International* notes that balance training is another effective technique in reducing falling frequency in older individuals.⁴ Your chiropractor can counsel you on the best tests to assess the health of your bones and he or she can suggest dietary changes to help limit bone loss as you age as well as create a balance training program for you.

Insufficient Physical Activity

Reduced physical activity causes decreased muscle tone, diminished strength, and loss of flexibility and bone mass - all possible contributors to falls in elderly individuals.

Your chiropractor can assess your muscular strength, cardiovascular fitness and mobility to generate a physical activity routine for you that suits your interests, aptitudes, and abilities. Your chiropractor can also address problem areas in your spine or extremities that may be limiting you from participating in regular physical activity. Chiropractic care - especially where it concerns keeping your joints and soft tissues in fine working order - is an important factor in remaining healthy and active well into old age. Walking, jogging, swimming and bicycling are constructive activities that can be performed throughout your lifespan to help prevent falls in your later years.

Hazards Around the Home

A significant number of falls in the elderly are caused by environmental hazards around the home. Tripping over objects on the floor is perhaps the most common, and often preventable, environmental hazard causing falls in older adults. Inadequate lighting, weak or wobbly furniture and loose rugs also cause numerous falls in the home. Consider mounting grab bars in key areas in your home to provide easy-to-reach support for elderly residents or guests. Other helpful prevention tips to reduce falls inside the home include adding nonskid mats to bathtubs, reducing clutter, getting rid of throw rugs, replacing oversized furniture and other household objects with smaller versions and using color changes to highlight variations in surface levels or types.

Quote to Inspire

“Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter.”

- Mark Twain

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3. Fuller GF. Falls in the Elderly. *American Family Physician*. 2000. Apr; 61(7): 2159-2168.
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