

Falling is Not a Normal Part of Aging!

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Today's Discussion

1. Why falls prevention is important
2. The major risk factors for falling
3. Why Balance is important in falls prevention
4. Suggestions for decreasing fall risks
5. Evidence Based Programs - SAIL and MOB

Why is Falls Prevention Important?

- ▶ Falls are the leading cause of injury-related hospitalization and injury-related deaths for older Americans; 14 million falls per year
- ▶ Most serious injuries: head trauma & hip fractures
- ▶ Eight million falls require medical attention; over 800,000 hospitalizations each year due to a fall.
- ▶ Annually, over \$50 Billion in medical costs related to falls; \$754 million fatal injures and the rest is due to non fatal injuries.
- ▶ In 2020, more than 36,000 older adults died as a result of a fall

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of blue, primarily on the right side, creating a modern, professional look.

**Fall Risks!!
Let's Talk
About Them!**

Intrinsic Risk Factors for Falls

(from CDC summary- STEADI)

- Age
- Having fallen previously
- Lower body muscle weakness
- Gait and balance problems
- Poor or reduced vision/hearing
- Fear of falling
- Postural hypotension
- Decreased sensation in feet
- Vertigo

Medications benefits and potential risk contributions

- Blood pressure medications
- Pain medications
- Sleep aid medications
- More susceptible to side-effects as you age
- Polypharmacy as an issue

Home and Community Hazards (Extrinsic Risk Factors for Falls)

- Lack of hand-railings on stairs
- Lack of bathroom grab-bars
- Poor lighting
- Clutter
- Trip hazards (uneven sidewalks)
- Slippery surfaces
- Shoe choice
- Throw rugs
- Small pets and toddlers

Example of a Combination of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Factors

Getting out of bed at night

- dark (extrinsic)
- not fully awake (intrinsic)
- getting up quickly (intrinsic)
- clear pathway (extrinsic)

Why Balance is Important in Falls Prevention

An understanding of how the Body's Balance System Works.

1. Sensory input from the body travels to the brain
2. Brain integrates all this sensory input
3. Brain directs body response to maintain balance

1. Sensory Input

- ▶ Eyes
- ▶ Inner ears
- ▶ Neck
- ▶ Joints
- ▶ Feet

2. Brain Integrates
and
3. Body responds

With age both integration
and response slows

What prevents us from reacting quickly?

- Muscle weakness
- Slowed reflexes
- Poor endurance
- Dual task complexity
- Low functioning of vision, vestibular, proprioception
- Cognitive impairments
- Lack of sleep

Aging and Balance Reactions

The Not-so-good News:

- Receiving sensory input, integrating it, and acting on it (reaction time) all slow down with aging.
- Muscles and bones become weaker.

The Good News:

- In almost all cases, with practice, we can improve our balance reactions.



So...

What can you
do?

What can You do?

Take Care of Yourself

- Annual physical
- Annual eye exam
- Annual hearing exam
- Gait and balance assessment
- Medication review

Are you a falls risk?

“Stay Independent”
Handout

Check Your Risk for Falling

| Circle "Yes" or "No" for each statement below | | | Why it matters |
|---|--------|--|---|
| Yes (2) | No (0) | I have fallen in the past year. | People who have fallen once are likely to fall again. |
| Yes (2) | No (0) | I use or have been advised to use a cane or walker to get around safely. | People who have been advised to use a cane or walker may already be more likely to fall. |
| Yes (1) | No (0) | Sometimes I feel unsteady when I am walking. | Unsteadiness or needing support while walking are signs of poor balance. |
| Yes (1) | No (0) | I steady myself by holding onto furniture when walking at home. | This is also a sign of poor balance. |
| Yes (1) | No (0) | I am worried about falling. | People who are worried about falling are more likely to fall. |
| Yes (1) | No (0) | I need to push with my hands to stand up from a chair. | This is a sign of weak leg muscles, a major reason for falling. |
| Yes (1) | No (0) | I have some trouble stepping up onto a curb. | This is also a sign of weak leg muscles. |
| Yes (1) | No (0) | I often have to rush to the toilet. | Rushing to the bathroom, especially at night, increases your chance of falling. |
| Yes (1) | No (0) | I have lost some feeling in my feet. | Numbness in your feet can cause stumbles and lead to falls. |
| Yes (1) | No (0) | I take medicine that sometimes makes me feel light-headed or more tired than usual. | Side effects from medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling. |
| Yes (1) | No (0) | I take medicine to help me sleep or improve my mood. | These medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling. |
| Yes (1) | No (0) | I often feel sad or depressed. | Symptoms of depression, such as not feeling well or feeling slowed down, are linked to falls. |
| Total | | Add up the number of points for each "yes" answer. If you scored 4 points or more, you may be at risk for falling. | |

Are you a falls risk?

“Check for Safety”
Handout

Use this checklist to find and fix hazards in your home.

STAIRS & STEPS (INDOORS & OUTDOORS)

Are there papers, shoes, books, or other objects on the stairs?

- Always keep objects off the stairs.

Are some steps broken or uneven?

- Fix loose or uneven steps.

Is there a light and light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs?

- Have an electrician put in an overhead light and light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs. You can get light switches that glow.

Has a stairway light bulb burned out?

- Have a friend or family member change the light bulb.

Is the carpet on the steps loose or torn?

- Make sure the carpet is firmly attached to every step, or remove the carpet and attach non-slip rubber treads to the stairs.

Are the handrails loose or broken? Is there a handrail on only one side of the stairs?

- Fix loose handrails, or put in new ones. Make sure handrails are on both sides of the stairs, and are as long as the stairs.

FLOORS

When you walk through a room, do you have to walk around furniture?

- Ask someone to move the furniture so your path is clear.

Do you have throw rugs on the floor?

- Remove the rugs, or use double-sided tape or a non-slip backing so the rugs won't slip.

Are there papers, shoes, books, or other objects on the floor?

- Pick up things that are on the floor. Always keep objects off the floor.

Do you have to walk over or around wires or cords (like lamp, telephone, or extension cords)?

- Coil or tape cords and wires next to the wall so you can't trip over them. If needed, have an electrician put in another outlet.

KITCHEN

Are the things you use often on high shelves?

- Keep things you use often on the lower shelves (about waist high).

Is your step stool sturdy?

- If you must use a step stool, get one with a bar to hold on to. Never use a chair as a step stool.

BEDROOMS

Is the light near the bed hard to reach?

- Place a lamp close to the bed where it's easy to reach.

Is the path from your bed to the bathroom dark?

- Put in a nightlight so you can see where you're walking. Some nightlights go on by themselves after dark.

BATHROOMS

Is the tub or shower floor slippery?

- Put a non-slip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub or shower.

Do you need some support when you get in and out of the tub, or up from the toilet?

- Have grab bars put in next to and inside the tub, and next to the toilet.



What Can You Do?

Exercise!

Exercise is a form of physical activity that is planned, structured and repetitive for the purpose of developing physical fitness.



BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

- ▶ Increases muscular strength, muscular endurance, and muscle mass
- ▶ Minimizes the slowing of reaction and movement times
- ▶ Reduces blood pressure and stiffness in large arteries
- ▶ Decreases blood lipid levels



Northern Virginia
Falls Prevention Alliance
has been implementing
evidenced-based programs
since 2016.

- ▶ Matter of Balance
- ▶ Stay Active and Independent for Life

Matter of Balance

- An evidence-based program designed to reduce the fear of falling and increase activity levels among older adults.
- Workshop consists of 8 two-hour sessions; meets 1x a week for 8 weeks or 2x a week for 4 weeks.
- A discussion based cognitive restructuring program with gentle exercises added at the 3rd week.
- A guest healthcare professional speaks to the group.

Stay Active and Independent for Life (SAIL)

- Evidence-based 55 minute exercise class
- Meets 2-3 times per week depending upon site offering.
- Includes cardio, static and dynamic balance exercises, strength training and stretching.
- Results seen when done regularly.

We welcome you to participate in a short SAIL Demonstration

- Be seated in a chair without wheels
- Have enough space to outstretch your arms to the side
- Demonstration will show the use of weights.



Marymount University/NVFPA
Virtual SAIL session

Winter/Spring SAIL Exercise Class

Tuesdays and Fridays,
January 12, 2024 to May 10, 2024
1:00 pm to 2:00 pm

If interested in attending, go to
www.novafallsprevention.com and scroll
down until you see the registration link.



www.novafallsprevention.com