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Senior Safety News

Reminders about falls and their consequences is the focus of this issue. Preventing falls is the number one way of keeping seniors at home and safe.

The following selection of articles can help to keep seniors aging in place with friends and neighbors.

Falls are the most frequent cause of trauma to seniors. They often lead to institutionalization.



This is not a good place for seniors to be. We want to help them avoid damaging themselves with a series of simple reminders that can help them become more aware of the dangers of aging while in their homes.

To be careful one must be aware. Awareness is accomplished with a series of Senior Safety Awareness seminars that emphasize prevention.

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Basics of Fall Prevention

Statistics show that:

More than 40% of people hospitalized from hip fractures do not return home and are not capable of living independently again;
 25% of those who have fallen pass away each year.

On average, two older adults die from fall-related injuries every day in California. Falls can result in hip fractures, head injuries or even death. In many cases, those who have experienced a fall have a hard time recovering and their overall health deteriorates.

In California alone, 1.3 million older adults experience an injury due to falling. A person is more likely to fall if she is age 80 or older or if s/he has previously fallen. Over time people may feel unsteady when walking due to changes in physical abilities such as vision, hearing, sensation, and balance. People who become fearful of falling may reduce their involvement in activities. Also the environment may be designed or arranged in a way that makes a person feel unsafe.



The good news is that with adequate knowledge, falls can be prevented.

How Can We Prevent Falls?

Researchers have identified that the most effective fall prevention programs have many components. First a person needs to understand what may put them at risk for falling. Some risks can be reduced.

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Medical providers can help to identify risks and develop a plan. Specific physical activity can target reduce fall risk by increasing balance and mobility skills. Also changes to the home and community environment can reduce hazards and help support a person in completing daily activities.

Medical Management (Risk Assessment and Follow-up)

The first step is to talk with a health professional about getting a risk assessment for falling. During routine doctor visits, ask the doctor about your risk of falling. Some of the health factors that can contribute to falls are osteoporosis, being over age 80, changes in balance and walking patterns, changes in vision and sensation, and taking multiple medications. Certain medications cause older adults to experience dizziness. Once you have an idea of some of the risks and how you might be affected, you can work with your doctor, other health professionals, and your family to determine what factors can be modified to reduce your risk.

Balance & Mobility (Physical Activity)

Studies show that balance, flexibility, and strength training not only improve and mobility, but also reduce the risk of falling. Statistics show that most older adults do not exercise regularly, and 35% of people over the age of 65 do not participate in any leisure physical activity. This lack of exercise only makes it harder for individuals to recover after a fall. Many people are afraid of falling again and reduce their physical activity even more. There are many creative and low-impact forms of physical activity for fall prevention, such as tai chi.



Environmental Modification

The environment can present many hazards. At home older adults are commonly concerned about falling in the bathtub or on steps. In the community there can be trip hazards such as uneven or cracked sidewalks. By making changes to the home and community environment a person can feel safer and less at risk of falling. For example, the bathroom can be modified by install grab bars as in the shower or tub, having a place to sit, and having non-slip surfaces. Steps can have handrails, adequate lighting, and contrast between steps. Community sidewalks in disrepair can be reported to city officials for repair.

..... *Source: Fall Prevention Center of Excellence*



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Falls at home

About half of all falls happen at home. The home - whether a single family dwelling, an apartment, or a mobile home - is where many older adults spend most of their time. Home modification can reduce the chances of falling at home.

Home modification refers to adapting or converting the physical environment to make performing tasks easier and reduce accidents. It includes removing hazards, adding grab bars or other assistive devices, changing how/where activities occur so as to minimize risks, and renovating or changing the structure to accommodate a disability.

Here are some everyday situations that pose risks for falls, and some possible solutions:

1. Lack of support in the bathroom/shower.
Solution: Install grab bars and use non-slip mats or non-skid strips.
2. Lack of support in the toilet.
Solution: Install grab bars or use raised toilet seat.
3. Climbing stairs.
Solution: Install handrails on both sides of the stairs.
4. Dark passage or stairway.
Solution: Install brighter lights, and have switches at both ends.
5. Objects in the way; such as books, clothes, newspapers, and shoes:
Solution: Remove them from the pathway.
6. Slippery rugs.
Solution: Remove or use double-sided tape to secure them to the floor.
7. Items out of reach.
Solution: Keep ones most often used at levels that can be reached easily.



Researchers have begun using low-cost sensors in homes to monitor the elderly for health risks

By Jeremy Hsu Posted 11.09.2009 at 3:17 pm 0 Comments

Elderly Monitors: They don't make sensors like they used to Julie Keefe for New York Times Sensor-studded clothes, carpets, and homes could track the gait of grandma or grandpa and ensure that they're not in danger of falling. The U.S. National Institute on Aging has sponsored initial research into how such wireless monitoring could better monitor the health of a growing geriatric population. The European Union has also devoted \$1.5 billion to studying technologies and services for the aged.



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Wearable and embedded sensors can already precisely gauge walking speed, stride, step width and body sway to try and detect warning signs that a person might be at risk of falling. The New York Times reports that falls among the elderly already constitute something of an “epidemic” that affects more than one third of people 65 or older, and costs up to \$75 billion annually in the U.S. alone.

The approach has expanded with a five-year study that puts wireless sensors in the homes of 230 elderly volunteers, and began in 2006 with funding from the U.S. National Institute on Aging. The U.S. study emerged as collaboration between the Oregon Center for Aging and Technology, the Oregon Health and Science University and Intel.

Sensors may not have become a dime a dozen just yet, but their growing affordability has clearly enabled projects such as this. Even Nintendo’s Wii has an accessory that monitors player heartbeats during games. And cell phones have begun incorporating sensors to transform into portable labs or medical devices.

Fall Prevention for Elderly Parents and Caregivers

Taking Precautions -

Many caregivers involved in the elder care of aging parents don’t realize how many fall hazards can be found in the common household until their elderly parent takes a bad fall and breaks a leg or hip and is hospitalized for months.

If you care for elderly parents in the home, fall prevention must also be taken into consideration in order to provide a safe and secure living environment for your loved ones.

Here’s an alarming statistic: nearly one in three seniors living in their own home or the home of adult children caregivers suffers from a serious fall at least once every year.

Check your house for:

- Loose rugs – make sure rugs are tacked down to the floor or purchase non-skid rugs. Better yet, get rid of the throw or area rugs. Rugs are a primary cause of falls for the elderly.
- Too much furniture – Do you have to be an acrobat to get around your living room? Are toys or vases or statues or knick-knacks scattered throughout the home?
- Inside or outside stairs that might be difficult to navigate
- An elderly-friendly bathroom - Does your Mom or Dad have something to hang onto in the bathtub, shower or around the toilet to help with stability?

