

## PREVENTING FALLS

If you happen to be over 65, you're probably aware that the risk of falling at your age is greater than any other age group. Falling may even be a fear that you are concerned with on a daily basis and it could cause concern and overwhelming worry. Chances are also that you may still have many questions regarding falls that are not easily accessible to you. This page is designed so that: a) questions and concerns you may have can be answered, b) you know the proper steps to take to avoid falling, c) to point out who is at risk the most, and d) to show you that there's nothing to be worried about if you remember to keep in mind and follow some of these basic steps throughout your daily life.

### Some Quick Facts About Falling

- ❖ The risk of falling for women is greater than it is for men
- ❖ A decrease in bone density is one of the leading factors in falls and injuries
- ❖ Most people who fall are unaware of the risk factors that attribute to their falls
- ❖ Awareness and alertness are the best ways to avoid falls

### Leading Risk Factors for Falls in the Elderly & Prevention Methods

#### 1. Osteoporosis

- ❖ Osteoporosis is a condition of decreased bone mass that leads to bones becoming more porous and therefore more prone to fractures
- ❖ Causes include hormonal changes, deficiencies of calcium & vitamin D and decreases in physical activity
- ❖ Osteoporosis is one of the leading causes of fractures for elders, especially females
- ❖ **Prevention Methods:** a) Eat and drink sufficient amounts of calcium, including: milk, cheese, yogurt, fish, soybeans, tofu and almonds
- ❖ b) Intake sufficient amounts of vitamin D, which is formed naturally by the body from sunlight; supplements for some are also helpful
- ❖ c) If your physician recommends medication, take it as this is an important factor in slowing osteoporosis
- ❖ d) Perform weight bearing exercises, such as walking, on a daily basis

#### 2. Lack of Physical Activity

- ❖ Lack of exercise and activity causes lower muscle tone, decreased strength and less bone mass and flexibility, which all create greater risk factors for falls
- ❖ **Prevention Methods:** a) Engage in physical activity **at least** once every other day for 15 minutes (more is encouraged), to increase bone & muscle strength and to improve balance & flexibility; i.e.- walking and swimming
- ❖ b) Take your time to get through your day safely & wear safe and supportive shoes (no open toe shoes without a back)

#### 3. Impaired Vision

- ❖ Age-related diseases like cataracts & glaucoma increase the risk of falls also by impairing depth perceptions, acuteness & peripheral vision
- ❖ These impairments make navigational abilities worse and make it more difficult for an elder to prevent themselves from a fall **before** it occurs
- ❖ **Prevention Methods:** a) Get check-ups regularly by an ophthalmologist for diseases like glaucoma & cataracts;
- ❖ b) Use handrails & bars as much as possible
- ❖ c) Use clean eye glasses on a regular basis to prevent blurry vision
- ❖ d) Have sufficient lighting in your home

#### 4. Medications

- ❖ Sedatives, anti-depressants & anti-psychotics decrease mental awareness & balance, contribute to falls; those who take more meds are at more of a risk
- ❖ **Prevention Methods:** a) Know the side effects of all the medications your taking
- ❖ b) Talk to a physician about what ways taking meds will lower risk of falling
- ❖ c) Limit your alcohol intake as it makes the effects of certain medications stronger

#### 5. Environmental Hazards

- ❖ Almost all falls in the home for the elderly involve some type of hazard, such as a loose shoe, item of clothing or laundry basket; poor lighting, loose rugs, un-sturdy furniture and lack of grab rails only make these risks even worse, since hazards become harder to see and avoid
- ❖ **Prevention Methods:** a) Do a walk-through of your home to identify potential hazards and make mental notes of them; interior designers & Occupational Therapists can help here
- ❖ b) Install handrails and adequate lighting in important spaces;
- ❖ c) Avoid rushing around home, take your time

## **Summed Up**

- ❖ Some of the most important things to remember if you want to avoid falling are as follows: a) try to stay healthy by taking in enough calcium and exercising as much as possible: it will make you feel better and will prevent falls; b) be aware of all factors that can contribute to falling, whether it has to do with your vision, medications or surroundings; if you don't think you can do this for yourself, ask someone to help; c) most of all, take your time both around the house as well as outside doing other tasks, rushing only makes you more prone to falling
- ❖ Overall, be aware and alert, and if you are worried, ask your physician for an evaluation by a physical therapist to assess your personal risk for falling. The therapist may also provide you with an exercise program and additional safety tips.