

WHAT ARE FALLS?

A fall is defined as any event that leads to an unplanned, unexpected contact with a supporting surface, such as the floor or a piece of furniture, that is not the result of a push or shove or the result of a medical event, such as a heart attack or fainting.

A near-fall is a stumble or loss of balance that would result in a fall if you were unable to catch yourself.

There are lots of factors that can increase your risk for falls, including:

- History of a previous fall.
- Being female.
- Having a sedentary lifestyle.
- Being in overall poor health.
- Recent hospitalization.
- Advanced age.
- Difficulty with walking or keeping your balance.
- Leg weakness.
- Becoming fatigued easily.
- Limited flexibility.
- Problems with your vision or skin (touch) sensation.
- Getting dizzy when you stand up from sitting or lying down (orthostatic hypotension).
- Medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke, Parkinson disease, or Alzheimer disease.
- Trouble with your memory and thinking.
- Joint pain or arthritis.
- Taking too many medications or taking certain types of medications.
- Depression and/or anxiety.
- Home hazards such as throw rugs, poor lighting, or a lack of handrails on stairs.
- Inappropriate footwear.
- Inappropriate use of a walker or a cane.

The more risk factors you have, the greater your risk of falling.

FALLS ARE COMMON AND COSTLY, BUT CAN BE PREVENTED

One-third of adults over the age of 65 are likely to fall this year, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and they probably won't be the only ones harmed.

"It's important to realize that falls among older persons, with their staggering physical, emotional as well as economic consequences, have the potential to impact not only patients, but all members of a family," Robert Glatter, MD, wrote in *Forbes* ("Why Falls Should Be Part Of The Doctor-Patient And National Conversation For Older Persons" - July 28, 2015).

Falls cause everything from scrapes and bruises to broken arms, and 95% of hip fractures. Indeed, with falls leading to more than 700,000 hospitalizations per year, related medical costs exceed \$30 billion.

The good news is that research shows that older adults can proactively prevent falls and their dangerous consequences with the help of a physical therapist.

A systematic review of randomized controlled trials ("The effectiveness of physical therapist-administered group-based exercise on fall prevention: a systematic review of randomized controlled trials" - October-December 2013) demonstrated that group-based exercises led by a physical therapist are effective for decreasing fall frequency, increasing balance, and improving quality of life. The results also suggested the group-based exercises promoted greater patient satisfaction and exercise adherence. Additionally, physical therapists can evaluate a person's fall risk and create a personalized plan to improve your balance and strength.



FALL PREVENTION: SIMPLE TIPS TO PREVENT FALLS

Falls put you at risk of serious injury. Prevent falls with these simple fall-prevention measures, from reviewing your medications to hazard-proofing your home.

1. MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH YOUR DOCTOR



What medications are you taking?
Have you fallen before?
Could your health conditions cause a fall?

2. KEEP MOVING



If you avoid physical activity because you're afraid it will make a fall more likely, tell your doctor. He or she may recommend carefully monitored exercise programs or refer you to a physical therapist. The physical therapist can create a custom exercise program aimed at improving your balance, flexibility, muscle strength and gait.

3. WEAR SENSIBLE SHOES



Consider changing your footwear as part of your fall-prevention plan. High heels, floppy slippers and shoes with slick soles can make you slip, stumble and fall. So can walking in your stocking feet. Instead, wear properly fitting, sturdy shoes with nonskid soles. Sensible shoes may also reduce joint pain.

4. REMOVE HOME HAZARDS



Take a look around your home. Your living room, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, hallways and stairways may be filled with hazards. To make your home safer:

