Falls In The Elderly

Falls are the top cause of injuries, accidents, and accidental deaths in people over the age of 65. Falling is a real threat to your ability to live on your own.

CAUSES

- Poor eyesight or poor hearing, can make you more likely to fall.
- Illnesses and physical conditions can affect your strength and balance.
- Poor lighting or throw rugs in your home can make you more likely to trip or slip.
- The side effects of some medicines can upset your balance and lead to falling. These include medicines for depression, sleep problems, high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart conditions.

PREVENTION

First, be sure your home is as safe as possible. Here are some tips:

- Wear shoes with nonskid soles (not house slippers).
- Be sure your home is well lit so that you can see things you might trip over.
- Use night lights in your bedroom, bathroom, hallways and stairways.
- Remove throw rugs or fasten them to the floor with carpet tape. Tack down carpet edges.
- Do not put electrical cords across pathways.
- Have grab bars put in your bathtub, shower and toilet area.
- Have handrails put on both sides of stairways.
- Do not climb on stools and stepladders. Get someone else to help with jobs that call for climbing.
- Do not wax your floors at all, or use a non-skid wax.
- Have sidewalks and walkways repaired so that surfaces are smooth and even.

Next, get regular check-ups from your doctor, and take good care of yourself:

- Have your eyes checked every year for vision changes, cataracts, glaucoma and other eye problems.
- Have your hearing checked every two years, or anytime you or others think that you cannot hear well.
- See your doctor if you have foot pain or corns. Sore feet can contribute to falls.
- Let your doctor know if a medicine is making you feel dizzy or making you lose your balance.
- If your doctor wants you to use a cane or a walker, learn how to use it--and then use it all the time.
- When you get up from bed during the night or in the morning, sit on the side of the bed for a minute or two before you stand up. This will give your blood pressure time to adjust, and you will feel less dizzy.
- If you need to go to the bathroom often at night, consider using a bedside commode.

And keep your body in good shape:

- Get regular exercise, especially walking.
- Do exercises to strengthen the muscles you use for walking and lifting.
- Do not smoke.
- Minimize use of alcohol.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- If you feel dizzy, weak or unsteady on your feet
- If you feel confused
- If you fall.

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