



# FALLS



## INTRODUCTION AND STATISTICS

Falling and its resulting injuries are an important public health problem for older adults. The National Safety Council estimates that persons over the age of 65 have the highest mortality rate (death rate) from injuries. Among older adults, injuries cause more deaths than either pneumonia or diabetes. Falls account for about one-half of the deaths due to injury in the elderly. Falls often result in fractures of the hip and hand. Older adults are especially at risk because of balance impairments. However, several other factors may increase the risk of falling, including poor strength, medications and dizziness. Environmental factors, such as slippery surfaces or obstacles in the home, can also be a problem.

-30% people over 65 years of age fall each year

- One half are repeat fallers

-Falls increase with each decade of life

## RISK FACTORS

1. Medical problems: arthritis, foot problems, strokes, Parkinson, neuropathy, dizziness
2. Medications: sedatives, anti-depressants, alcohol, possibly anti-arrhythmics, digoxin, & diuretics
3. Environment: stairs, poor lighting, clutter on floor, throw rugs, cords, bathrooms
4. Impaired vision & hearing
5. Improper use of walkers & canes



## PREVENTION OF FALLS

Older adults can take several steps to protect themselves and reduce their chances of falling.

- Exercise regularly or participate in physical therapy. It's important that the exercises focus on increasing leg strength and improving balance.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review their medicines—both prescription and over-the-counter—to reduce side effects and interactions that may cause dizziness or drowsiness.
- Have your eyes checked by an eye doctor at least once a year and make sure that you update your eyeglasses to maximize your vision.
- Get rid of dangers at home:

- Remove loose carpets and rugs or tack down the carpets and substitute rugs with nonskid backing
- Add lights in dimly lit areas and at the top and bottom of stairs
- Use nightlights in bedrooms, halls and bathrooms
- Clean up clutter - especially near staircases
- Put hand rails on both sides of any steps or stairs in your home.
- Add "grab bars" near the toilet and bath tub, and no slip decals or a rubber mat in the tub or shower
- Wear firm shoes that are not slippery on the bottom. Don't walk around in loose slippers or socks.

Additional ways to lower hip fracture risk include:

- Getting adequate calcium and vitamin D in your diet.
- Undertaking a program of weight bearing exercise.
- Getting screened and treated for osteoporosis.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

### **Get up and Go test**

The “Get Up and Go Test” is an assessment conducted as part of a routine evaluation. Its purpose is to detect patients at risk of falling and to identify those who need further evaluation.

This test involves you:

1. Standing up on your own
2. Walking a short distance
3. Turning around and going back to your chair
4. Sitting down on your own

The doctor may perform other tests to evaluate specific causes of a fall.

## **SUMMARY**

It’s important that you speak openly with your physician about any concerns or questions you may have. You and your physician are team members! Your physician will be able to help you determine your fall risk and help take steps to prevent falls.

Your physician can also talk to you about devices you can use to contact emergency services if you do fall. Devices like the one pictured here can be worn around your neck like a bracelet or around your wrist like a watch. If you do fall, you can automatically call for help by pushing a single button.

