



Date: March 19, 2008

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Preventing Falls in the Elderly

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)—Anyone can fall, although the risk is higher in older people. This increased risk of falling may be the result of changes that come with aging and certain medical conditions, such as arthritis, cataracts or hip problems.

Since most falls occur in the home, make sure you have good lighting to avoid tripping over objects that are not easy to see; put night lights in bedrooms, hallways, near stairs and in bathrooms; and fasten rugs to the floor or ensure rugs have nonskid backing and tack down loose ends. Also, remove electrical cords from walking areas; install hand rails for support in bathrooms, showers and toilets, and have rails on both sides of your stairs for support; do not store items too high or low in the kitchen; and wear shoes with firm, nonskid soles.

“The most common reason for falls in the elderly comes from a decrease in the sense of balance,” said Jeffrey W. Milks, M.D., a family physician in New Albany, Ohio, and director of the Geriatric Fellowship at Riverside Methodist Hospital, Columbus, Ohio. “This loss of balance is extremely common as people age. As a result, when people have a near fall it turns into a real fall due to an inability to correct the loss of balance in time to prevent the fall.”

Also, take good care of your body to stay healthy by seeing your eye doctor once a year, getting regular physical activity to keep bones and muscles strong, taking good care of your feet, talking to your doctor about any side effects you may have from your medicines, do not smoke and limit alcohol to no more than two drinks per day.

“I encourage my elderly patients to get enough vitamin D because doing so has shown to decrease the risk of falls by 20 percent in some high risk groups,” said Milks.

When you get out of bed in the morning or at night to use the bathroom, sit on the side of the bed for a few minutes before standing up. Your blood pressure takes some time to adjust when you sit up. It may be too low if you get up quickly. This can make you dizzy, and you might lose your balance and fall.

The Ohio Academy of Family Physicians is a statewide professional association with more than 4,400 members, including practicing physicians, family medicine residents and medical students. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, both sexes and every disease entity. Family physicians provide comprehensive, continuing care to all members of the family.



FACT SHEET

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Tips to Lower the Risk of Falling

- Make sure that you have good lighting in your home. A well-lit home will help you avoid tripping over objects that are not easy to see. Put night lights in bedrooms, hallways, near stairs and in bathrooms.
- Rugs should be firmly fastened to the floor or have nonskid backing. Loose ends should be tacked down.
- Electrical cords should not be lying on the floor in walking areas.
- Put handrails in bathrooms for bath, shower and toilet use.
- Have rails on both sides of stairs for support.
- In the kitchen, make sure items are within easy reach. Do not store things too high or low.
- Wear shoes with firm, nonskid soles.

Tips on Staying Healthy

- See an eye doctor once a year.
- Get regular physical activity to keep bones and muscles strong.
- Take good care of your feet. If you have pain in your feet or if you have large, thick nails and corns, have your doctor look at your feet.
- Talk to your doctor about any side effects you may have from your medicines.
- Get enough vitamin D.
- Talk to your doctor if you have dizzy spells.
- Do not smoke.
- Limit alcohol to no more than two drinks per day.
- When getting out of bed, sit on the side of the bed for a few minutes before standing up.

Source: www.familydoctor.org