

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Prevention of Falls, Continued

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.
Orthopaedic Surgeon

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Preventing falls is as important as anything we can do as health professionals.

The scope of the problem is huge. Falls are the leading cause of older persons dying from injury. The number of falls and severity of injury, which results from the fall increases with age.

In a split second - life changes, often forever. One day you are O.K. The next your whole life is turned upside down. 25% of patients who have a hip fracture die within a year. 50% never return to the level of function they had before. Only 25% recover. That is very discouraging. Get the picture of why I am writing about it?

Falls have to be prevented. Period.

- **Physical Change**

Falls happen due to decreased reflexes, balance problems, hearing impairment, vision change, existing illnesses and not the least, medications.

- **Reflexes and Muscle Strength**

As you age reaction time slows and regaining balance following sudden movement is difficult. Falls can easily result. Keep active. It maintains muscle tone and flexibility. Regular walking helps a lot. Weight training can keep up strength in your arms and legs and improve how you move. Exercise can be prescribed for you at a physical therapy center.

- **Balance**

Improved balance helps prevent falls. Balance can be improved in classes to improve balance and coordination. Weak muscles increase the risk of falling. Same advice as in the paragraph above. Muscle strengthening and balance exercises are available to you and can be taught by a physical therapist.

- **Hearing**

Hearing loss can lead to falls when you do not clearly hear sounds around you that tell us we are in danger. If you are sure you have hearing loss, wearing a hearing aid can be a great benefit.

- **Vision**

Adequate vision is key to avoiding falls. You must have reasonable vision to avoid things in your path, judge steepness of chairs and curbs. Get periodic eye exams and wear glasses.

- **Illness and Medication**

This is a very large subject, too large to totally cover here. Illnesses that affect circulation, sensation and mobility can lead to falls. Medications can cause confusion, dizziness and slowed reflexes that affect your coordination and balance.

- **Behavior Factors to prevent falls**

Avoid alcohol
Slow down. Haste causes falls.
Stay focused in public places
Exercise
Good nutrition
Use a cane
Wear glasses if needed
Get a hearing aid if you need it
Wear good shoes indoors and out

Well, there you have it. Pay attention to all of these factors and you won't be seeing me to fix your fracture! Good luck.

www.orthopodsurgeon.com also has the Archive of all 73 Argus Orthopaedic Zone articles that have appeared in the Shepherd Argus. I hope you will look at the Archive for anything of interest you may have missed.

For much more information about falls, injuries and all the things I treat in the office and hospital please check out our office teaching website www.orthopodsurgeon.com, which can take you to Your Orthopaedic Connection.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives. I specialize in you.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush