

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Falling, Balance

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

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

I have written before that it seems to me that as an Orthopaedic Surgeon our patients falling has reached epidemic proportions.

Aging definitely is associated with many conditions that cause dizziness and a sense of imbalance.

Why They Fall

Very often there is no apparent reason and the person can't explain it. When they can explain what happened the list is endless. I won't even bother to list any because those causes are the immediate cause. The tip of the iceberg as it were.

Normal Balance

Staying upright under normal circumstances and if there is an upset requires many systems working together like a finely tuned machine. Like what?

- Well the brain is in charge of coordinating everything.
- Sensory information is sent from skin
- Eyes tell where you are in your surroundings
- Muscles and joints tell about movements
- Inner ear tells the brain how you are moving
- Heart has to efficiently pump blood
- Blood vessels have to maintain your blood pressure

Going Out Of Balance

What are the causes? You mean besides stepping on your cat? OK, here goes. In addition more than one cause is happening at the same time in many instances.

- Low blood pressure when you stand up
- Malfunction of inner ear, vestibular system
- Irregular heart beat
- Failing vision
- Neuropathy (diabetes and other)
- Muscle weakness of aging
- Arthritis of large joints
- Overweight
- Anxiety
- Post stroke deficits
- Medication (maybe should be at the top of the list)
- Spinal Stenosis

It is amazing any of us over 50 can stay upright at all!! And even people under 50 can have some of these things also that cause them to wipe out.

These are only the medical factors what contribute to poor balance and falling. We said nothing about ice, snow and all the household hazards that are present in our houses. And don't forget the cat.

Besides all of the above we humans often do really dumb things that get us into trouble and cause bad things to happen to us. Is there any cure for poor judgment?

Is It Hopeless?

Sometimes I am afraid it is. But then other times I think that things could be better if the patient had –

- Good attentive medical care
- Help to remove household hazards
- Used better judgment
- Taken advantage of balance programs that are available.

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Dr. Haverbush