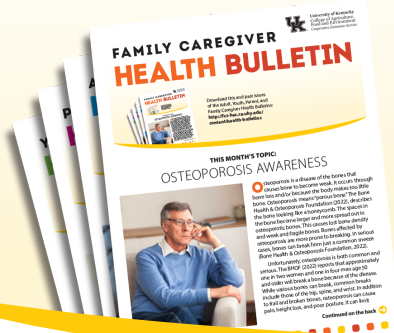


FAMILY CAREGIVER

HEALTH BULLETIN



SEPTEMBER 2023

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

FALL PREVENTION: FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION



Fall Prevention Awareness Week is a nationwide observance that brings awareness to preventing and reducing the risk of falls as well as helping older adults live without fear of falling, according to the National Council on Aging. This is important because more than 1 in 4 adults aged 65 and older fall each year. In 2020, 31.2% of older adults in the Commonwealth reported a fall, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report.

The CDC shares that falls are the leading cause of injury and injury-related death among older adults. Severe falls can lead to fractures, traumatic brain injuries, permanent disability, lengthy hospital stays and admission to long-term care facilities. Falls can lessen independence and negatively affect quality of life. It is common for

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Caregivers should track yearly wellness visits and stay on top of vision and hearing checkups.

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older adults to fear falling because of the risk of injury. They are also worried about embarrassment and want to remain independent. As a result, a fear of falling can lead to limited activity. This then leads to physical decline and social isolation.

Most falls are preventable. The NCOA recommends six steps to prevent a fall:

- 1. Exercise.** Find an exercise and/or balance program that helps build stability, strength, and flexibility. Make it fun. Go with a friend to make sure you keep going.
- 2. Talk to a doctor.** Be honest about fall history and/or fear of falling. Request a fall assessment.
- 3. Manage medications.** Talk to a pharmacist or health-care provider about prescription and over-the-counter medications. They can help find medications or potential medication interactions that may increase the risk of falling.
- 4. Get eyes, ears, and feet checked yearly.** The eyes, ears, and feet play key roles in balance.
- 5. Enhance home safety.** Remove clutter and tripping hazards. Keep rooms, hallways, and stairways well lit. Use a nightlight at night. Properly install grab bars in the bathrooms and use nonslip bath mats.
- 6. Talk with family and friends.** Be assertive and honest with family and friends so they can play a role in fall prevention. Trusted family and friends can brainstorm ways to support safety and independence as well as reduce any fear of falling. They can help find helpful information and resources. Not only will they know about your changing needs, they can also know what to do after a fall.

As a caregiver, keeping an older adult's health includes safety and preventing accidental injury. It is important to empower someone in your care, at risk of falling, to take action. In some cases, you may have to start the conversation about possible fall concern and encourage the six steps above to help prevent the consequences of a fall. Caregivers



should stay alert and note any changes in health. Caregivers should track yearly wellness visits and stay on top of vision and hearing checkups. It is helpful for caregivers to note if a loved one is holding on to furniture or another person for support or if they are having difficulty transitioning from sitting to standing. A caregiver should also know their loved one's current medications. They should also keep an eye on home safety. The CDC offers a Home Fall Prevention Checklist for Older Adults at https://www.cdc.gov/steady/pdf/check_for_safety_brochure-a.pdf. You can also call your local Area Agency on Aging or County Cooperative Extension Office to find community-based physical activity programs and resources to support fall prevention.

REFERENCES:

- CDC. (2020). Older Adult Falls Reported by State. Retrieved June 22, 2023 from <https://www.cdc.gov/falls/data/falls-by-state.html>
- NCOA. (2023). From Awareness to Action: This year's Falls Prevention Awareness Week theme. Retrieved June 22, 2023 from <https://www.ncoa.org/page/falls-prevention-awareness-week-toolkit>

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