

[What You Need to Know about Preventing Falls](#)

Category : Safety

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The following article is a transcript of the Community Focus segment that we do each month for KEOM 88.5FM in Mesquite, Texas. It was recorded at their studios on July 22, 2003. The Community Focus segment is alternated with other guests several times each month. The Community Focus segment is aired weekdays at 10:15AM, 2:15pm and 6:15PM. The program is hosted by Dr. James Griffin, the Station Director. The topic of Barb's segment this month is What You Need to Know about Preventing Falls.

Dr. Griffin: What's the topic of the day, Barb?

Barb: Today we're going to talk about an important, and oftentimes preventable, problem that is the leading cause of injuries to older people in the United States. According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, over 11 million elderly people fall each year – which amounts to every one out of 3 people over the age of 65! Speaking from a financial standpoint, treatment for the injuries and resulting complications from falls costs more than \$20.2 billion each year. Speaking from a personal perspective, dealing with the pain, time and trouble of coping with a broken hip, leg or arm, costs more than even the financial aspect!

Dr. Griffin: Besides for being older and maybe a little less steady on their feet, what are some other reasons or risk factors for falls among people over the age of 65?

Barb: There may be a variety of reasons for falls, in addition to having a more unsteady gait. Some medical risk factors may relate to falls also. For example, having arthritis can affect one's ability and flexibility to get up and down stairs or just walk around the house. Alzheimer's disease and other dementias can also cause an increase in confusion and unsteadiness. Other neurological conditions such as multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease or stroke can likewise make it more difficult to easily maneuver indoors or outdoors. In addition, some medications can cause dizziness. Complicate these factors with poor vision or hearing loss, well, one's probabilities of falling increase dramatically!

Dr. Griffin: What can people do to minimize the chances of falling, especially those who are dealing with any of these conditions?

Although some risk factors, such as Alzheimer's disease or arthritis cannot be changed, other factors can be addressed and modified. Again, the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons suggest the following guidelines:

1. See your doctor annually for a thorough check-up, including vision, hearing, cardiac health and blood pressure.
2. Include calcium and Vitamin D in your diet for healthier bones.

3. Start and/or maintain an exercise program as recommended by your physician. Exercise can really help with balance and bone strength.
4. Watch your alcohol consumption.
5. Wear shoes with nonskid soles that fit well.
6. Talk with your doctor about the medications you are currently taking. Ask about any possible side-effects that may cause dizziness or fatigue.
7. Do a thorough review of your house. Go through each room, looking for electrical cords across the floor, poor lighting in rooms, tables in awkward places making them difficult to maneuver around, loose area rugs, slippery kitchen floors, etc. Keep stairways clear of junk. Make sure that the lighting is sufficient along stairways and corridors. In the bathroom, especially, remove loose throw rugs, install sturdy grab bars on the walls as needed, use a specially designed seat in the bathtub if getting in and out of the bathtub is difficult, and keep a night light on at all times.

These and more suggestions can be found at the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons's™ website: www.aaos.org or you can call them about their "Prevent Injuries America" program at 1-800-824-2663. Likewise, there are many other helpful websites though the internet with useful hints about home safety!