

# Older Adult Fall Prevention

Falling down is not just part of getting older. It is a serious problem and one that impacts 33% of adults, age 65 and older. Falls are the leading cause of fatal and non-fatal injuries, and annually lead to more than 500,000 hospitalizations a year. In 2010 alone, the estimated direct medical costs were \$30 Billion.<sup>1</sup>

The risk of falling does increase with age, but age is just one risk factor. Usually it takes two or more risk factors together to cause a fall such as, new medications, worsening vision and poor lighting. Understanding these risk factors is one of the first steps to prevention.



## Other risk factors include:

- Weakened muscles
- Poor balance
- Use of medication
- Use of alcohol or other substances
- Vision changes
- Chronic health conditions
- Poorly designed public spaces
- Cluttered environment
- Slippery conditions or other environmental factors
- Wearing old, worn out or ill-fitting shoes

## Many falls can be prevented by making small changes in your behavior and understanding where and when you are at increased risk.

- Exercise can help reduce the risk of osteoporosis (bone loss) and strengthen muscles that help your balance. A list of local group classes can be found through the Older Adult Falls Coalition.
- Getting an annual physical examination including an eye test.
- Having any medical device properly fitted such as, a cane or a walker.
- Choosing clothes that don't get caught under your shoes.

- Wearing flat, sturdy shoes with nonskid soles.
- Review your medication, especially how the medications react with each other, with a doctor or pharmacist to make sure they will not impact your balance.
- Taking medications as prescribed -with food, and without substances such as alcohol.
- Creating clear pathways in your home by:
  - Moving cords to the wall
  - Cleaning up clutter
  - Having grab bars by toilets and showers
  - Adding lights to dim areas and replacing loose carpet and rugs
- Seeking medical care or alerting your physician if you have noticed balance issues or had a minor fall.

Ultimately, falls happen to just about anyone, but a little bit of preparation and knowledge can save you or a loved one from serious injury, and even death.

<sup>1</sup> Falls Among Older Adults: An Overview. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/adultfalls.html>.