

Caregiver Assistance News

"CARING FOR YOU ... CARING FOR OTHERS"

It's Fall – Don't You Fall!

Many people experience problems with their sense of balance as they get older. Disturbances of the inner ear are the main cause. Vertigo, the feeling that things around you are spinning, is also a common symptom. Experts believe that more than 40 percent of Americans will experience dizziness that is serious enough to go to a doctor.

Balance disorders are one reason older people fall. Falls and fall-related injuries, such as hip fracture, can have a serious impact on an older person's life. If the person in your care falls, it could limit his activities or make it impossible for him to live independently. Some balance disorders are caused by problems in the inner ear. Aging, infections, head injury, certain medicines, or problems with blood circulation may result in a balance problem.

Diseases of the circulatory system, such as stroke, also can cause dizziness. High or low blood pressure also can cause dizziness. Eating low-salt or salt-free foods and avoiding caffeine and alcohol can make symptoms less severe. Maintaining a healthy weight and exercising can also help a person manage blood pressure and balance problems.

It is important to have a potential balance disorder diagnosed and treated as soon as possible.

Source: NIH Senior Health; www.nihseniorhealth.gov

Note Water therapy is a safe way for a person with a disability and the elderly to exercise because there is no danger of falling.

Fall Prevention Measures

- Stay in when rainy and icy.
- Have regular vision screening check-ups for eyeglasses.
- Use separate reading glasses and other regular glasses if bifocals make it difficult to see the floor.
- Be cautious when walking on wet floors. Look carefully at floor surfaces in public buildings. Many floors are made of highly polished marble or tile that can be very slippery.
- Wear good foot support when walking. New shoes are slippery and crepe-soled shoes can cause the toe to catch.
- Have foot pain problems corrected and keep toenails trimmed and feet healthy for good balance.
- Avoid gravel or rock yards or paths.
- Stop at curbs and check the height before stepping up or down. Be cautious at curbs that have been cut away to allow access for bikes or wheelchairs. The incline may lead to a fall.
- Consider wearing hip protectors for added protection should you fall.
- Use a shoulder bag or fanny pack to leave your hands free to use hand rails as you go up and down steps and on escalators.
- Use a walker or cane as needed for added stability.



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If You Fall

How you *react* after a fall can cause more injuries than the fall itself. If you try to get up too quickly or in the wrong position, you may make an injury worse.

Relax, take several deep breaths and determine if you are hurt. If you believe you are injured, do not attempt to get up. Instead, call 911 or get help from a family member.

But if you do not feel dizzy, are not in pain and feel strong enough to get up, follow these steps:

1. Roll over on to your hands and knees.
2. Crawl to a steady chair.
3. Put your strongest leg under you so that your foot is on the floor.
4. Stand up using your arms on the chair for support.
5. Sit on the chair until you feel comfortable to walk.

Be sure to let your health care provider know about your fall. A physical or occupational therapist can teach you and the person in your care the best techniques for getting up from the floor after a fall. **(Check local programs in your community on fall-prevention classes.)**

If the Person in Your Care Falls

A good way to tell if a part of the body has been injured in a fall is to compare it with an uninjured part. For example, compare the injured leg with the uninjured leg. Do they look and feel the same? Do they move the same way?

When you *suspect a broken bone*, follow these steps:

- If the person cannot move or use the injured limb, keep it from moving. Do not straighten a deformed arm or leg. Splint an injury in the position you find it.
- Support the injured part above and below the site of the injury by using folded towels, blankets, pillows, or magazines.
- If the person is face down, roll him over with the “log rolling” technique (see illustration). If you have no one to help you and the victim is breathing adequately, leave the person in the same position.
- If the person does *not* complain of neck pain but is feeling sick to the stomach, turn the person on one side.
- If the person complains of neck pain, keep his neck steady by putting a few pillows on either side of his head. Keep the head flat.
- Place a piece of cloth on the injury site and apply ice over the cloth.
- Keep the person warm with a blanket and make the person as comfortable as possible.
- Call 911.



Log rolling technique— Turning a person safely from the stomach onto the back.

Taking Care of Yourself— Tai Chi for Improved Balance

Tai chi, the ancient, graceful martial arts form in which slow movements flow into one another, lowers blood pressure, improves balance, and even eases arthritis pain. It is an exercise almost anyone who can walk can do safely. Tai chi takes the joints gently through their range of motion, while the emphasis on breathing and inner stillness relieves stress and anxiety. Classes are inexpensive, and it can be practiced almost anywhere at any time, with no special equipment or clothing.



Inspiration

I do not take a single newspaper, nor read one a month, and I feel myself infinitely happier for it.
—Thomas Jefferson

Live Life Laughing!

I can't sleep at night.

Then sleep during the day!



Memory Care - Outside

Safe outdoor areas are important, especially for those who are frail or have dementia.

- ✓ Ramps for access
- ✓ A deck with a sturdy railing
- ✓ Alarmed or locked outside doors
- ✓ Enough light to see walkway hazards at night
- ✓ Nonslip step surfaces and stair handrails
- ✓ Cover porch steps with a gritty, weather-proof paint and step edges marked with reflective paint

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To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

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SAFETY TIPS– Checklist for the Doctor

Help the person in your care write down key information about dizziness so she can give the list to the doctor during the visit.

- * Describe your dizziness or balance problem.
- * How often do you have dizziness or balance problems?
- * Have you ever fallen? If so, when did you fall, where did you fall, and how often have you fallen?
- * What medicines do you take? Remember to include all over-the-counter medicines, including aspirin, anti-histamines, and sleep aids.
- * How much do you take each day? What times of the day do you take the medicine?
- * What is the health condition for which you take the medicine?

At the Doctors Office

- * Check for foot problems
- * Bring all medications, both prescribed and over the counter
- * Ask about gait assessment
- * An eye exam is important to have every year to be sure vision is not deteriorating.

NEXT ISSUE... ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING–FEEDING & BOOSTING NUTRITION

Caregiver Assistance News

“ C A R I N G F O R Y O U ... C A R I N G F O R O T H E R S ”

Q U I C K Q U I Z

Falls can be serious, even deadly, for older adults. Each year, about 3 million adults 65 and older are treated in emergency departments nationwide for serious injuries from a fall. Answer True or False to the questions below.

1. Maintaining a healthy weight and exercising will not help a person manage balance problems.
T F
2. Having foot pain problems corrected and keeping toenails trimmed and feet healthy is important for good balance.
T F
3. The incline at curbs that have been cut away to allow access for bikes or wheelchairs may lead to a fall.
T F
4. How you *react* after a fall can cause more injuries than the fall itself.
T F
5. If the person in your care falls, it could limit his activities or make it impossible for him to live independently.
T F
6. A physical or occupational therapist can teach you and the person in your care the best techniques for getting up from the floor after a fall.
T F
7. Disturbances of the inner ear are the main cause of balance problems.
T F
8. Experts believe that more than 40 percent of Americans will experience dizziness that is serious enough to go to a doctor.
T F
9. Bifocal glasses never make it difficult to see the floor.
T F
10. If a person is injured from a fall, keep the person warm with a blanket until medical help arrives.
T F

Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____