

Safety Starts With Preventing Falls

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The third largest cause of death in the state of Florida is falling! When young, we fall, we get up, and we go on but an older adult, especially one with dementia may find a fall to be a life altering event. The risk is even greater for the person suffering with Alzheimer's disease and the caregiver who is often tired and stressed.

Myths about falls:

Myth: Falling should be accepted as a natural part of aging.

Fact: Falling is not a natural part of getting older! It is usually the symptom of something else going on with our bodies. It may be balance, inner ear, Parkinson's Disease, exhaustion, weak legs, medication side effects, not paying attention...the list goes on and on, but many of these symptoms can be successfully treated. It is important to consult your physician when falls occur.

Myth: Most falls cannot be prevented.

Fact: Most falls CAN be prevented. Some events are unavoidable but most accidents are a result of carelessness, inattention, or speeding through

the day. Most falls occur around the home during routine activities. Make sure all clutter is up off the floor and rugs are securely fastened and in good repair.

Myth: If I let family or the physicians know I have fallen they may think I can no longer take care of myself.

Fact: Be proactive; when you become unsteady on the ladder or step-stool it is time to get someone to help you move those items on the top shelf down to a reachable level. Ask for help when you need it.

Myth: Falling is humiliating.

Fact: Though it is not pleasant and sometimes embarrassing, falls do occur. Do not try to get up immediately, but take time to assess if there is any damage before moving on. If you or your loved one fall don't hesitate to call the paramedics for assistance.

What can we do to prevent falls?

1. Exercise! There are simple, gentle exercises that can keep up your leg strength and flexibility. It is never too late for some form of exercise to make a difference in your health and safety.

For exercise and balance classes in your area go to www.caresfl.org for a schedule.

2. Know your medications! Many of the medications taken can contribute to dizziness and poor balance, if you suspect this is the case, consult your physician.
3. Nutrition! When we live alone, don't feel good, or are stressed, nutrition loses its focal importance. We may forget to eat, or not eat a balanced diet, or not enough food, all of which can contribute to weakness and risk of falling.
4. Home Safety! There are check lists available from the Pasco Fall Prevention Coalition that can help you to make your home safer. Contact the Alzheimer's Family Organization for a copy.
5. For those suffering with memory loss it is important the environment remains the same. Furniture placement, toilet articles and items used regularly should be kept in a consistent place to avoid frantic searching and aimless wandering.