



News Column for week of September 16, 2019

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Fall Prevention Begins With You

The first day of fall marks Falls Prevention Awareness Day. The holiday, that falls on September 22nd this year, is sponsored by the National Council on Aging and is an opportunity for all to learn how to prevent fall-related injuries that affect older adults.

One in three adults over the age of 65 fall every year. The leading cause of injury-related death among the elderly is due to a fall. These statistics are scary, but many accidents can be prevented.

The fear of falling is the most common fear among older adults. People who fall often think the fall happened because of situations beyond their control. However, risks have been identified that contribute to falls, especially among older adults. Following are some of the risks to consider:

- Have you fallen in the last six months?
- Do you take four or more prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, or herbal supplements daily?
- Do you have to use your arms to stand up from a chair?
- Do you ever feel unsteady on your feet, weak, or dizzy?
- Has it been two years or more since you had an eye exam?
- Has your hearing gotten worse with age?
- Do you exercise less than 30 minutes each day you exercise?
- Do you drink alcohol?
- Do you have more than three chronic health conditions (such as heart, lung problems, diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, etc.)?

The more “yes” answers you have, the greater your risk of falling. To keep alcohol from being a contributor to falls, limit alcohol intake to one drink per day. Otherwise, for the other risk factors listed above, consult your health care provider(s) about your concerns and possible remedies.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and National Council on Aging (NCOA) have identified four areas to reduce the risk of falling:

1. Increase physical activity. Improving physical strength and balance can reduce falls risk.
2. Review and use medications safely. Falls are one of the most common side effects of medicine.
3. Identify and screen for vision problems. Low vision is a common cause of falls.
4. Increase home safety. Falls are often caused by hazards in the home that are easy to fix.

As to the first three areas listed above, again, obtain assistance or guidance through your health care providers. The 4th area – home safety – calls for some individual assessment. Fifty percent of falls by older adults occur in the home. If you're like most people, you don't think about making your home safer until you have fallen, had major surgery or a hospital stay.

Some home safety questions to consider include: Do you have to walk around furniture? Is there clutter on the floor or stairways, or cords to step over? Are there throw rugs? Do you have burned out bulbs or dim lighting in your home? Can you get in and out of your furniture easily? Is the tub or shower floor slippery? Do you need support getting in or out of the tub or up from the toilet? Is the path from your bed to the bathroom dark? These are just a few factors to consider.

As you picture these situations, you can see that most of the hazards would be fairly easy to remedy. However, you might not be aware of possible dangers in your home, due to being very familiar with your surroundings. If you question the fall risks of your current living spaces, consider having someone do an assessment of your living areas. Start with asking a friend or relative to do a walk-through of your home, both inside and out, to look for troublesome areas.

Most aging adults want to age-in-place – in their own homes. Reducing falls risk will help to preserve their independence. For more information on falls risks and prevention steps, contact your Southwind Extension District office or call 620-625-8620.