

Best Practices for Seniors Falls Prevention In Primary Care

Medication Best Practices

- Medication from the benzodiazepine class of drugs increases the risk of falling among seniors.
- The evidence supports psychotropic drug withdrawal as a means to reduce falls but more studies are needed on the practical application of this strategy.
- Compliance is an important consideration in psychotropic medication withdrawal as it appears difficult for psychotropic drug users to stop. Clinicians may need to consider alternative treatments for anxiety and sleep disorders to enhance compliance.
- High doses of Vitamin D appear to decrease the risk of falls in seniors. More studies are needed to determine the impact of dose and side effects.

Exercise Best Practices

- Balance training was a component in most exercise programs where there was a statistically significant reduction in falls.
- The use of Tai Chi exercises to enhance balance was the only effective strategy examined in isolation of other strategies.
- Careful consideration is recommended when developing exercise programs as the optimal intensity is not known. At least one exercise regime has been shown to increase falls.

Environmental Modification Best Practices

- Home modification as part of a fall reduction program is an effective strategy for reducing falls among seniors.
- The success of home modification programs may be enhanced when combined with education and counseling on the reduction of behavioural and physical risk factors.
- Successful home modification programs often included those with financial and/or manual assistance in completing the modifications.
- Occupational therapists' are ideal professionals for conducting home assessments as they can assess both the seniors' environment and their ability to function within that environment.
- Success and cost effectiveness of environmental strategies are enhanced by targeting those who are ready for change.
- Readiness for environmental modifications may be linked to having had a recent fall, and/or an increased understanding of the risks and prevention strategies.

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Scott, V.J., Dukeshire, S., Gallagher, E.M., and Scanlan, A. (2001). A Best Practices Guide for the Prevention of Falls Among Seniors Living in the Community. Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, Division of Aging and Seniors, Health Canada. Retrieved July 11, 2008 from http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/pubs/best_practices/pdf/BestPractice_Falls_e.pdf

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Clinical Intervention Best Practices

- Clinical assessments by nurses or physicians appear to be effective in reducing falls and related injuries but these effects have not been assessed in isolation of other strategies.
- One study found that over half of the emergency room patients admitted for fall injuries had balance deficits and visual impairments.
- For seniors who have sustained a fall, a thorough medical assessment should be conducted for underlying physical or cognitive contributors to the fall.
- Screening for physical and cognitive impairments that contribute to falling is effective when combined with interventions aimed at reducing behavioural and environmental risk factors.
- One study indicates that initial screens may be conducted by trained volunteers who administer reliable risk assessment questionnaires, providing referrals are made to the appropriate health or social service providers.

Education Best Practices

- Education strategies may play a key role in multi-faceted risk reduction strategies by improving motivation through increasing awareness and knowledge of fall risk factors.
- The reduction of falls in one study may have been due in part to the use of theoretical models for adult learners, such as valuing shared peer learning and peer modeling for change.

Multi-Factorial Best Practices

- Multiple strategies directed at a wide range of risk factors are effective in reducing falls and related injuries.
- Multidisciplinary teams trained in the detection and prevention of fall risk factors are necessary to address the complex combination of factors that cause falls in seniors.

Health Promotion Approaches to Best Practices

- Community-based strategies allow for multifaceted approaches.
- Seniors should be key participants in the design and implementation of community-based fall prevention strategies.

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