

## Falls: General Information

**General Information** Falls occur frequently and are a major cause of disability and death in seniors. More than one third of people over the age of 65 have at least one fall each year.

Injuries sustained in a fall may range from trivial bruises to life-threatening trauma. Head injuries and fractures of long bones (for example, hip fractures) lead the list. It is important to realize there may be a delay in the onset of the effects of head injury. Even falls that do not lead to injury can have a negative effect on older adults. After a fall, elderly patients often voluntarily restrict their activity because they fear another fall. This reduction in exercise leads to further weakness that, in turn, increases the risk of another fall — a vicious cycle.

**Who Is at Risk of Falling?** Everyone is at risk, and risk for falls increases as we age. This increased risk of falling is likely the result of changes that come with aging, plus other health conditions such as arthritis, cataracts, or hip surgery.

**How Can I Decrease My Risk of Falling?** Most falls occur in the home. Make sure your home is safe by following these tips:

- Make sure that you have good lighting in your home. As your eyes age, less light reaches the back of the eyes where your vision is located. Use night-lights in your bedroom, hall, and bathroom, and on stairs.
- Rugs should be firmly fastened to the floor or have nonskid backing. Loose ends should be tacked down.
- Move electrical cords so they are not lying on the floor in walking areas.
- Put handrails in the bathroom for bath, shower, and toilet use.
- Ensure stairs have rails on both sides for support and are well-lit.
- In the kitchen, make sure items are within easy reach. Don't store things too high or too low in order to avoid the use of dangerous stepladders or stools.
- Wear shoes with firm, non-skid, non-friction soles, not bare feet or sock feet. Avoid wearing loose-fitting slippers that could cause you to trip.

*(Adapted with permission from the Practicing Physician Education Project 2006)*