Reduce Your Fear of Falling

The most universal and basic of all fears, across all cultures, is the fear of falling. Behavioral research has established that babies are born with only two natural fears. One is a fear of certain noises and the other is the fear of falling. Over time people do develop other fears. Learning to deal with the fear of falling can establish an important sense of confidence that often will translate into the ability to deal with other fears.

Source: The Study of Falling by Neil Ohlenkamp

Read below how to reduce your fear of falling by creating a plan, tips you can use to reduce injuries if you fall, and learn how studies show that fear may actually effect your risk of falling.

Please forward this newsletter onto someone you know that would like to learn more about this subject.

Have a Plan if You Fall

One method to reduce the fear of falling is be prepared by having a plan in place. Recruit your family, friends and neighbors to be your support crew in an emergency.

1. Make sure you can reach the telephone from the floor.
2. Make it easy for the person who comes to help you get in. Leave a spare key with them or in a combination safe outside.
3. Consider getting a personal medical alarm if you have a history of falling.

If you do fall, follow these steps

1. Remain calm and assess the situation.
2. Make a decision on whether to try to get up.
3. If you can get up - tell someone you fell and seek medical help if needed, and make sure to tell your doctor about your fall on your next visit.
4. Follow these steps below to help you get up by yourself:
   - Look around for a sturdy piece of furniture, preferably a chair.
   - Bend your knees up and roll onto your side.
   - Push yourself up so that you are in a side-sitting position.
   - Move into a four-point kneeling position, on hands and knees.
   - Crawl or drag yourself to the chair.
   - Put your inside hand on the chair, then bring your outside leg up ready to push yourself in a kneeling position.
   - Push yourself up with your outside hand on your outside knee and your inside hand on the chair.
   - Pivot your bottom around and sit on the chair.
   - Rest before trying to move.

If you cannot get up, follow these steps:
1. Activate your personal alarm if you have one.
2. Slide or crawl to get help or reach the phone.
3. Make a loud noise if you cannot reach the phone.
4. Try to make yourself comfortable until help arrives.
5. Gently move around to stop one part of your body from being under too much pressure.

Source: Prevention Care Recovery - Standing up to Falls

How Do You Fall Safely?

The injuries sustained from falls are potentially fatal and can be life-changing. We asked physical therapist, Gretchen Sandfort of Ponderosa Valley Wellness for her advice on what steps can be taken to lessen the injuries from a fall.

Most importantly, protect your head from impact. Try and hold your head forward if you are falling backwards.

Do not outstretch your arm to break a fall. Try to keep elbows bent to allow muscles to absorb the force rather than bones.

For landing - choose the location on your body covering the most surface area such as the front side of body rather than just a hand or a knee.

Grabbing onto railings that extend your arm while continuing to fall can result in nerve injuries, do not outstretch. It would be better to just sit back if falling down steps, then push up from the
What are the Results of Fearing You May Fall?

Is it possible that worrying about falling can affect if you really do fall? A study recently performed in Sydney, Australia involving 500 men and woman aged 70 - 90 was conducted to research this very thing.

After a series of medical, physiological and neuropsychological tests were performed, the participants were placed in certain categories. Eleven percent, whom the research team dubbed the "anxious" group, had a higher perceived risk than was physiologically warranted. Twenty percent, labeled "stoics," actually were at risk physiologically - but didn't rate their risk as high.

Followed over a year, the anxious folks did fall more than the group as a whole: 40 percent suffered multiple or injurious falls. But only about a third of the stoics fell, despite their higher physical risk.

Psychological differences appear to affect people's self-assessments, said Stephen Lord, an applied physiologist who was a member of the research team. "These anxious people were more likely to be depressed, to have restricted their activities, and it looks as though these factors feed on each other," he said.

"People who are fearful do less, and that leads to deconditioning, to a loss of strength and balance," he explained. Increasingly phobic about falling, sometimes unwilling to leave their homes, "they become preoccupied with the possibility. They catastrophize." The stoic sorts, by contrast, maintained more positive attitudes and more active lives despite their physical problems.

"The message isn't: don't worry about falls," Dr. Lord said. It's that while fears can cause people to enter a downward spiral, "you can also spiral up." For information on the complete study, click here.

Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter." ~Mark Twain

And so it is... concerning the risk of falling and the associated coping strategies one can adopt to reduce the fear.

Recently, Betti and I completed a lay leader coaching/training program provided by the Aging Resources of Central Iowa that addresses these very issues and we look forward to volunteering our time as trainers in the Greater Des Moines area and surrounding Central Iowa counties.

An evidence based falls management program, 'A Matter of Balance' lay leader program was designed by the MaineHealth System and is modeled on the original program developed by the Roybal Center at Boston University. It is approved by both the Administration on Aging (AoA) and the National Council on Aging (NCOA) and is specifically designed to reduce fear of falling, stop the fear of falling cycle, and improve activity levels among older adults. The program includes eight two-hour classes lead by trained coaches.

A Matter of Balance uses practical coping strategies to reduce fear of falling and to diminish the risk of falling, including group discussions, mutual problem solving, exercises to improve strength, coordination and balance, and home safety evaluation. This structured group intervention works best with 10-12 participants.

For more information on the Matter of Balance: Managing Concerns about Falls Lay Leader Model program and it's availability in your area, please visit [here](#):

Additionally, for compelling evidence as to the healthy outcomes concerning the measured success of the training, please visit [here](#):

Bill Kerrigan

Fall Prevention Services goal is to help you begin to make fall prevention a part of your everyday life. We help you identify risks for falls through education, strength building and assessments so that you can continue to live comfortably, independently and safely in your home.

Fall Prevention Services provides advice to individuals, families, architects, builders and remodelers for safe, comfortable, independent living in your home or where you chose to live. Our consultants are Certified Aging in Place
Specialists (CAPS), trained on the changing needs of individuals as they live independently in their homes. For more information about Fall Prevention Services visit www.fallpreventionservices.com or call 515-991-3653.

Sincerely,

Betti Kerrigan, CAPS
Fall Prevention Services

This new letter is intended for informational purposes only. Nothing contained in this new letter is or should be considered or used as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. This new letter and its services do not constitute the practice of medical, nursing or other professional health care advice, diagnosis or treatment.

© 2010 Fall Prevention Services