

**Falls Prevention Week, September 2021**

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# FallsFree CheckUp

**YOU CAN PREVENT A FALL**

In September, we are promoting Falls Prevention Awareness Week (September 20 – 24) to increase awareness about this important health issue. We are emphasizing two key points: falling is not a normal part of aging, and many falls are preventable. To do this, the Healthy Living Center of Excellence (HLCE) is partnering with the National Council on Aging (NCOA) to promote specific, Evidence-Based programs as well as changes in older adults' lifestyles and living environments that can aid in tackling this issue.

Falls are a major problem. One in four older adults fall every year. Falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries in people aged 65 and over, resulting in hip fractures, broken bones, and head injuries. More than 80 percent of older adults have at least one chronic condition like diabetes, a history of strokes, or arthritis, which can increase their risk of falling. Falling can be a deeply traumatic experience, causing older adults to act hesitant to venture beyond their homes, become fearful and depressed. These fears can lead to a cycle of isolation and loneliness and be a barrier to staying healthy and independent.

The HLCE offers Evidence-Based programs that strengthen older adults, improve their sense of balance, and encourage them to become more active, and, in the process, more resilient. Some of these offerings discuss modifying their home environments to eliminate clutter and tripping hazards. The programs include Walk with Ease, which encourages older adults to pursue this safe and efficient exercise; Tai Ji Quan, a research-based balancing regimen for older adults; and A Matter of Balance, which presents practical strategies to avoid falls and reduce the fear of falling. This summer, we produced the popular A Matter of Balance program online in Albanian for the first time.

This month, HLCE and NCOA are seeking to team with those who serve on the front lines of emergencies, first responders. These men and women know firsthand the devastation falls cause: 17 percent of all 911 calls are triggered by falls. And many people who fall once fall again within a short period of time. Firefighters and emergency medical workers can play a key role in spreading the word about ways to prevent falls, not just to give advice about throwing out throw rugs and tucking extension cords out of highly trafficked areas in their homes. They can refer older adults to us in the wake of an accident.

Here are six steps people can take to help older adults reduce the risk of falling:

- Ask whether they are concerned about falling. If they have experienced falling, dizziness, or problems with balance, suggest they mention this to a physician.

- Discuss their current health conditions. Are they having trouble managing their health? Is it more difficult for them to complete their daily routine? Are they taking advantage of Medicare's preventative benefits, such as annual wellness visits?
- Ask about their last eye checkup. When was it? Is their prescription up to date? Are they using their eyeglasses as advised by an eye doctor?
- Notice if they are holding onto walls, furniture, or another individual when walking. Do they struggle to get up from a chair? They could need to work with a physical therapist to improve their balance, strength, and gait. Or perhaps they would benefit from using a cane or walker to ambulate.
- Talk about medications. Confirm they are taking these as instructed. Be aware that non-prescription medications that contain sleep aids—those with “PM” in their names—may cause balance issues and dizziness.
- Do a walk-through safety assessment of their home. Check for safety issues involving lighting, stairs, and the shower/bathtub and toilet in the bathroom.

**Join us for a live webinar about falls prevention, “Responding to (F)ALL,” from 12 to 12:30 p.m. on Monday, September 20<sup>th</sup>. Hear Rep. Tram Nguyen and others address this urgent issue. To register:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcgduuhqTksGtUU14P0zWXaPI5ncSP51FOb>

Knowledge is power—so we all have the power to reduce the number of falls older adults experience every year. Let's spread falls prevention awareness!