

Fall Risk

25% of Americans over 65 years of age fall each year¹

Falls are a serious event as they are costly to overall health. Over 800,000 patients a year are hospitalized because of a fall injury¹. Falls can cause head injuries and broken bones that often lead to other health issues. While the risk of falls increases with age, falls are not a normal part of aging and are often a preventable.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), there are several risk factors for falls. Falls often occur when you have several risk factors such as:²

- Lower body weakness
- Dizziness and imbalance
- Certain medications
- Vitamin D deficiency
- Poor vision
- Decreased sensations in your feet
- Home hazards such as rugs and stairs

By modifying the risk factors that you have control over, such as removing trip hazards around the house, the risk for falls can be significantly reduced. It is also important to evaluate your sensory systems, such as vision, hearing, and balance, in order to better understand your risk for falls.

The Balance System

The balance system incorporates sensory information from the vestibular (ear), visual, and proprioceptive (sense of touch) systems. The body uses all of this information to interpret the environment so that we can maintain balance. The vestibular system provides key sensory information to the balance system and is located within the inner ear. An intact, well-functioning vestibular system helps in the prevention of falls.

How can you prevent falls?

- Work on your balance, strength, and flexibility

- Review your medications with your doctor– some medications may increase your risk of falling
- Ask for a fall risk assessment with a balance professional
- Check your vision and hearing annually
- Home safety: improve lighting, remove tripping hazards, install hand rails
- Tell your family and friends about fall risk³

Role of Audiologists

Audiologists identify, diagnose, and provide treatment options for patients with vestibular disorders that lead to dizziness and imbalance. Some audiologists specialize in vestibular disorders and may work on fall prevention teams along with physicians and physical therapists. A team approach to fall prevention is ideal. Do you think you or a family member may have a vestibular / balance disorder? Click on the “Find an Audiologist” link at www.audiology.org to locate and set up an appointment with an Audiologist in your area.

References

1. CDC Injury prevention and control. Retrieved August 29, 2017 from: <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/>
2. Risk factors for falls. Retrieved August 29, 2017, from https://www.cdc.gov/steady/pdf/Risk_Factors_for_Falls-a.pdf
3. [National Council on Aging. Retrieved October 12, 2017, from https://www.ncoa.org/healthy-aging/falls-prevention](http://www.ncoa.org/healthy-aging/falls-prevention)