



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Falls Among Older Adults

Prevalence of Falls and Fall Injuries Among Persons Aged ≥65 Years — United States, 2006

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Well, the good news is people are living longer. The bad news is, old age still has its downside. With reflexes slowing and eyesight fading, we lose that spring in our step. As a result, even climbing stairs can be a monumental task, while walking through our homes can be like running an obstacle course. According to a recent CDC study, falls are the leading cause of injuries among people over 65 years of age.

Dr. Judy Stevens is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, and she joins us today to discuss ways for senior citizens to avoid costly injuries from falls. Welcome to the show, Judy.

[Dr. Stevens] Thank you very much. I'm pleased to be here.

[Dr. Gaynes] Judy, how did CDC discover that falls are the leading cause of injuries among older people?

[Dr. Stevens] We've known that falls are the leading cause of injury, death, and emergency department visits for people who are over 65, and in this latest study, we found out that 16 percent of older adults reported that they'd fallen in the last 3 months. This was 5.8 million older adults who said that they had fallen in the last 3 months.

[Dr. Gaynes] What activities or obstacles are causing most of the falls that older adults have?

[Dr. Stevens] Many falls are the result of the aging process — a combination of lack of strength, many medications that people take, failing vision, and also obstacles in the home. And these can all combine to result in a fall.

[Dr. Gaynes] What steps can older people take to avoid falling?

[Dr. Stevens] There are four things that are very important for older adults to do to help prevent falls. The first is physical activity — exercise — especially exercise that helps increase muscle strength and improve balance and coordination. The second is having their medicines reviewed by a doctor to make sure there are no interactions or side effects that can lead to falls. The third is having their vision checked to make that that's as good as possible. And fourth, improving home safety, which includes adding railings

and grab bars and removing trip hazards, such as throw rugs and cords. These can all help reduce falls in the home.

[Dr. Gaynes] Are there ways to encourage older people to actually take these steps?

[Dr. Stevens] We know that older adults want to remain independent and live in their own homes for as long as possible, so it's very important for them to understand that they have an active role to play in reducing their chance of falling.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about preventing falls?

[Dr. Stevens] We have a great deal of information and free publications that can be ordered on our website at www.cdc.gov/injury.

[Dr. Gaynes] That's all for this week's show. Be sure and join us again next week. Until then, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.