



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Watch Your Step

Traumatic Brain Injury-Related Emergency Department Visits, Hospitalizations, and Deaths — United States, 2007 and 2013

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[Announcer] *This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

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

As we get older, getting around can become more difficult. One of the biggest risks to the well-being of older Americans is traumatic brain injuries caused by falling.

Dr. Matthew Breiding is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, and he's joining us today to discuss ways to help the elderly avoid serious injuries. Welcome to the show, Dr. Breiding.

[Dr. Breiding] Thanks. Happy to be here.

[Ted Pectorius] So, Dr. Breiding, how many people suffer serious head injuries each year in the United States?

[Dr. Breiding] We don't know, but we do know that in 2013, there were 2.5 million emergency room visits, over 280,000 hospitalizations, and over 56,000 deaths due to traumatic brain injury.

[Ted Pectorius] That's a lot of injuries. What are the most common causes?

[Dr. Breiding] The most common causes are falls, being struck by or against an object, motor vehicle crashes, and assaults.

[Ted Pectorius] What are the symptoms of a potentially serious head injury?

[Dr. Breiding] There're really a wide range of symptoms experienced as a result of a traumatic brain injury. Any head injury that causes symptoms should be checked out by a doctor. But where we really get concerned, and immediately help should be sought, is when someone loses consciousness, they experience repeated vomiting or nausea, they have slurred speech or decreased coordination, they have a headache that gets worse and does not go away, or they have drowsiness and have difficulty getting up.

[Ted Pectorius] One of the focuses of your article was on older people. So, what can an older person do to reduce their risk of falling?

[Dr. Breiding] The best thing they can do is talk to their doctor, particularly if they think they may be at risk for falling. And there are a number of things your doctor can recommend that have been scientifically shown to reduce the risk for falling. These include physical exercise

programs, such as Tai Chi; Vitamin D supplements; walking through your home to reduce hazards, such as poor lighting or loose rugs; as well as medication management to ensure that combinations of medication aren't causing balance problems.

[Ted Pectorius] OK so we know not everybody's going to go see their physician, so family members, friends, what can they do to help people avoid falls?

[Dr. Breiding] They can encourage someone to get exercise or even go get exercise with a friend. They can also walk through the home with them to reduce home hazards

[Ted Pectorius] Well, thanks. And finally, where can listeners go to get more information about preventing falls in older adults?

[Dr. Breiding] Listeners can go to cdc.gov and in the A to Z list, choose Falls-Older Adults.

[Ted Pectorius] Will do! Thanks, Dr. Breiding.

[Dr. Breiding] Thank you.

[Ted Pectorius] I've been talking today with Dr. Matthew Breiding about ways to prevent traumatic brain injuries among the elderly.

Regular physical activity to maintain or improve balance and agility can help older people stay mobile and avoid serious injury. In addition, removing objects that could be tripped over and arranging furniture to make navigating the home safer can help prevent falls.

Until next time, be well. This is Ted Pectorius for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

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