



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Keeping Seniors Safe

National Fall Prevention Awareness Day – September 22, 2013

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

[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.

Falls are the leading cause of injuries among older adults in the U.S. and can result in reduced mobility and loss of independence. Dr. Judy Stevens is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. She's joining us today to discuss ways to prevent fall-related injuries among older adults. Welcome to the show, Judy.

[Dr. Stevens] Thank you very much

[Dr. Gaynes] Judy, how serious a problem are falls among older adults?

[Dr. Stevens] Falls are extremely common; one out of every three older adults, that's people sixty-five and older, fall every year and over 2 million people are treated each year in emergency departments for fall injuries.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are the most common serious injuries among older adults from these falls?

[Dr. Stevens] Most falls don't cause injuries, but one out of five does cause a serious injury like a head injury or a fracture. And each year there are about 260,000 hip fractures.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are the main causes of falls?

[Dr. Stevens] Falls don't just happen, and there's usually more than one cause. Falls are often the result of muscle weakness or poor balance, and that's combined with some environmental condition such as a tripping hazard, a cord, or a throw rug. And other causes are side effects of medicines like tranquilizers or sleeping pills and also not being able to see well. [Dr. Gaynes] Judy, what health conditions put adults at higher risk for injuries from falls?

[Dr. Stevens] There a number of health conditions that increase a person's chances of falling by affecting their balance or walking ability, and these would include arthritis, diabetes, stroke, and Parkinson's disease.

[Dr. Gaynes] Give us some safety tips for older adults.

[Dr. Stevens] You can take steps to prevent falls by exercising to improve your balance and strengthen your muscles, especially in your legs; Thai Chi's a good example. It's also important to have a doctor or pharmacist review your medicines, including over the counter medicines, to avoid side effects like dizziness or confusion that can lead to falls. Have your vision checked by an eye doctor at least once a year and update your eyeglass prescription. And then finally, fall-proof your home by getting rid of clutter and possible tripping hazards like extension cords, improving the lighting, putting handrails on both sides of staircases and, in the bathroom, putting grab rails both inside or outside the tub or shower.

[Dr. Gaynes] Judy, where can listeners get more information about avoiding fall-related injuries?

[Dr. Stevens] There's more information at cdc.gov and put "preventing falls" into the search box.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Judy. [PAUSE]

I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Judy Stevens about fall-related injuries among older adults. Reduce your chances of falling: exercise regularly, have your healthcare provider review your medicines, get annual eye exams, and fall-proof your home. Talk to your health care provider about ways you can stay independent, active, and safe.

Until next time, 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.