



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Taking Steps to Prevent Falls

Falls and Fall Injuries Among Adults Aged ≥65 Years — United States, 2014

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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.

For older adults, falls can mean serious injury, loss of independence, or even death. Certain changes associated with aging increase the risk for falls, but falls *can* be prevented.

Elizabeth Burns is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. She's joining us today to discuss falls among older adults and ways to prevent them. Welcome to the show, Elizabeth.

[Ms. Burns] Thank you for having me.

[Dr. Gaynes] Elizabeth, how common are falls among older adults?

[Ms. Burns] Falls are incredibly common. More than one quarter of Americans 65 and older reported falling in the previous year.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are some reasons people are at greater risk for falls as they get older?

[Ms. Burns] As Americans age, they stop being as active as they were and this leads to reduced muscle mass, as well as reduced bone mass. Older Americans have more severe chronic conditions and this also leads to more prescription medication use. And all of these things independently increase the risk of falls.

[Dr. Gaynes] Who is most likely to be injured from a fall?

[Ms. Burns] Everyone's at risk of being injured in a fall. In 2014, there were over seven million fall injuries. However, women experienced about two-thirds of those. Older age groups also experience more fall injuries, and this is a result of things like more chronic conditions, like we mentioned before, increased prescription medication use, and reduced bone density.

[Dr. Gaynes] How can older adults' health care providers help?

[Ms. Burns] Health care providers should discuss falls with their older adult patients. Less than half of older adults who fell in the past year talked to their doctor or their health care provider about falling. Doctors and health care providers should be aware that there are medications that increase the risk of falls and discuss that with their patients and think about stopping or switching or reducing those medications. They should also talk about supplementing with vitamin D which can prevent the risk of falls and fall injuries.

[Dr. Gaynes] What can an older adult do to prevent falls?

[Ms. Burns] Well, besides talking with their health care provider, they should keep moving. Walking's a good start, but older adults need to focus on activities like tai chi which can increase strength and balance. Most falls happen within the home so simple things like installing grab bars and railings within the bathroom and making sure there's plenty of light in the house are simple solutions that can reduce their risk.

[Dr. Gaynes] Elizabeth, where can listeners get more information about preventing falls among older adults?

[Ms. Burns] Listeners can go to cdc.gov/steady, which is spelled s-t-e-a-d-i.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Elizabeth. I've been talking today with CDC's Elizabeth Burns about falls among older adults. Remember, talk openly with your health care provider about fall risks, including medications that might increase your risk. Ask about ways to help prevent falls, including supplements, like vitamin D, and exercises, like tai chi, which can improve strength and balance.

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.