

Countywide Services Agency

Department of Health and
Human Services

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Ready-to-use news article

(Fall Prevention Week is Sep. 21-25, 2009)

(Note to Editors: A Board resolution on Falls Prevention will be presented at the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors meeting on September 22, 2009 at 9:45 AM, 700 H Street, Sacramento, CA)

Regular Physical Activity, Hazard Awareness are Keys to Preventing Injuries Caused by Falls

By Glennah Trochet, M.D., Sacramento County Health Officer

It's a startling statistic: an estimated *one-third* of older adults in the U.S. fall down every year. What causes falls? There are many factors, including environmental hazards, inner ear disorders, muscle weakness, use of multiple medications, difficulty waking or balancing, reduced vision, or chronic health problems. Even squirrels have been implicated – as a 75 year old Sacramento woman can attest. She required emergency room treatment after she attempted to toss a rock at a defiant squirrel that refused to stay out of her pecan trees. As she leaned back for leverage, she fell and broke her wrist.

Falling is the leading cause of both fatal and non-fatal injuries for persons 65 years of age and older. Men are actually 49% more likely than women to die from a fall, and women are 67% more likely than men to have a non-fatal fall injury.

In Sacramento County, there were 4,157 accidental falls requiring hospitalization in 2007, and 2,685 of them (64%) involved persons age 65 and older. Total estimated costs for treatment was in excess of \$130-million. The average hospital stay was at a cost of more than \$9,400 per day for each person.

Although the likelihood of falling increases substantially with advancing age, it is gratifying to note that is not an inevitability of growing old. Research shows that falls and their sometimes debilitating injuries are largely preventable community health problems.

With is a great time to “bone up” on some of the easy things you can begin doing now to reduce the chances of suffering a fall.

1. Ask your doctor or a trained healthcare professional to perform a Fall Risk Assessment and review your medications.

2. Engage in regular physical activity, such as walking for 10-30 minutes a day or other physical activity that fits with your interests and abilities.
3. Get an assessment of your home environment and make changes to reduce safety risks. Make modifications if needed, such as installing handrails, to make your home safer.
4. Watch for outdoor hazards that could trip you up, such as cracks in sidewalks, holes, and changes in elevation. Report them to your local jurisdiction when you find them so they can be repaired.

By finding and eliminating hazards at home and in the community, guarding against disorienting prescription interactions, and engaging in regular physical activity, each of us can greatly reduce the chances of being hurt in a fall.

Web Resources

www.StopFalls.org

Information for individuals, families and researchers provided by the Fall Prevention Center of Excellence.

http://Sacramento.NetworkOfCare.org/aging/library/fall_prevention.cfm

Facts sheets, videos and resources provided by the Sacramento County Network of Care.

<http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/index.html>

Fact sheets and information aimed at preventing falls provided by the Centers for Disease Control Injury Center.

www.SCPH.com

Health information provided by Sacramento County Public Health, including information on Fall Flu vaccination clinics, H1N1 Flu, West Nile Virus prevention, and more.