

Simple Steps To Reduce Fall Risks

(NAPSA)—Every year, one in three adults over age 64 falls. But certain exercises and simple home modifications help reduce the risk.

“Half of falls occur in a person’s home. Falls are the main reason older people go to emergency departments,” says Steve Albert, Ph.D., co-director of the University of Pittsburgh Prevention Research Center (PRC).

The PRC is part of a nationwide network of 37 academic and community research partners funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to find ways to keep people healthy. Several PRCs research ways to help older adults avoid falling. Dr. Albert is comparing the effectiveness of two fall-prevention programs, and health agencies will use findings in choosing which program to offer.

“Most falls involve changing location, such as while walking or moving from a bed or chair,” says Dr. Albert. “Sometimes, falls happen when someone carries laundry down stairs without a railing.”

“Stairs are a challenge for people with balance problems,” says Elizabeth Phelan, M.D., a University of Washington PRC researcher who runs a fall-prevention clinic in Seattle. Because evidence shows that people can reduce their fall risk by improving balance and strength, Dr. Phelan refers many patients to EnhanceFitness, an exercise class developed by the Washington PRC. Proven to improve balance and strength, EnhanceFitness is offered at 450 sites nationwide.

Older adults who fall are at risk for more falls, Dr. Phelan says. She is researching the feasibility of emergency medical technicians providing fall-prevention information when responding to fall-related 911 calls. Acting on



EnhanceFitness participants improve strength and flexibility, which can reduce fall risk.

such information may reduce callers’ risk of future falls.

“Falls rob people of their independence,” says Dr. Phelan. “Many older adults can no longer live on their own if they have suffered serious fall-related injuries.”

People should address fall hazards when they’re young so they can live at home as long as possible, says Marcia Ory, Ph.D., a Texas A&M Health Science Center PRC researcher.

Dr. Ory studies how to implement effective fall-prevention programs and policies. “Many states offer fall-prevention screening, referrals and programs, but more offerings are needed,” she says. “Older adults and their caregivers should ask their health care providers and public health agencies about these programs.” A list of effective programs is at www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/compendium.html.

For more information about the CDC’s PRC Program, visit www.cdc.gov/prc.

Fall-Prevention Tips

- Improve balance and strength;
- Keep cords, shoes, papers, plants and boxes out of walkways;
- Add grab bars in and beside the tub/shower and next to the toilet;
- Use a nonslip mat or appliques in the tub/shower;
- Install railings in stairways;
- Improve lighting;
- Avoid or secure throw rugs.



Note to Editors: September is Fall Prevention Month