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## Preventing falls for seniors

Every year, more than 11 million Americans over the age of 65 fall, and injuries related to falls account for more than 1.6 million visits by seniors to the emergency room<sup>2a</sup>. Falls are the leading cause of fractures, hospitalizations due to trauma, loss of independence and injury deaths among older adults<sup>2a</sup>. The number of falls as well as the severity of the resulting injury tends to increase with age<sup>3</sup>. Fractures tend to occur in the hand, arm, spine, hip, pelvis or ankle. Fortunately, taking steps to prevent falls at home, where approximately 60 percent of falls occur<sup>1b</sup>, can significantly reduce the risk of falling.



**Carol Lawrence**  
Director of Rehabilitation  
North Shore Medical Center

“At North Shore Medical Center we recently opened the new balance center with fall prevention emphasis,” said Carol Lawrence, the director of Rehabilitation at North Shore Medical Center. “Our specialized center offers evidence-based assessments and treatments to improve vestibular and balance disorders, in addition to identifying early risk for falls.”

Falls can happen anywhere and at any time, from getting out of bed to climbing stairs. Older adults may be able to prevent falls by following these safety tips.

### Talk with your doctor

It is important to have regular physical and eye examinations, including an evaluation of any heart or blood pressure problems. Check with your doctor about any side effects of medications you are taking or potential drug interactions that could increase your fall risk. For a physician referral, please call 1-800-984-3434

### Stay active

Regular exercise can help strengthen muscles, increase agility and endurance, and improve balance and coordination. Aerobics or tai chi may be recommended by your physician.

### Safeguard your home

“At our center, occupational therapy plays a big roll in fall prevention,” said Lawrence. “A component of our program has great emphasis on patient and family education for transitioning the home.”

Eliminate tripping hazards around the house by having a clear pathway between rooms, securing loose area rugs and removing door thresholds higher than half an inch. Always keep clutter off the floor and clean up spills as soon as possible. Install handrails on stairs and grab bars in the bathroom. Place a rubber mat or textured adhesive strips in the bathtub or shower. Keep electrical and extension cords out of the way.

“Home environments are reviewed to help identify safety hazards within a patients home and help us to provide a resolution to prevent falls from occurring,” Lawrence states.

### Wear the right shoes

Wear low-heeled shoes that have nonskid soles. Avoid high heels, shoes with smooth soles and floppy slippers. Select shoes that either tie or have fabric fasteners to ensure a good fit. Do not walk around in stocking feet and use a shoe horn if you have difficulty putting on shoes.

### Watch where you're going

“Clutter can be a big part of a home environment and can lead to disorganization – which can become a safety trap,” says Lawrence.

Turn the light on when entering a room and when going up or down the stairs. Avoid rushing to answer the phone or door. Arrange your closet and cabinet so things are within an easy reach. Keep a flashlight handy in case of a power failure.

“Nightlights are also important to have in the home – these small lights help illuminate pathways in the home,” Lawrence said. “This is good for people of any age.”

### **Use assistive devices**

Canes and walkers can help you stay balanced and prevent harmful falls. A grabber can help you pick up lightweight items that are slightly out of reach so you do not have to bend over and potentially lose your balance.

### **Eat right**

Adults of all ages should get adequate amounts of calcium and vitamin D to keep their bones strong. For people over age 50, that means consuming 1,200 mg of calcium daily<sup>2b</sup> by eating calcium-rich foods such as dairy products, dark green, leafy vegetables, and nuts, as well as taking calcium supplements.

Having a fear of falling should not rule your life. For more information about preventing falls, talk with your doctor or visit the National Institute on Aging Web site at [www.nihseniorhealth.gov](http://www.nihseniorhealth.gov).

"Fall prevention is a lifestyle change to promote quality and healthy living," said Lawrence.

The new Vestibular and Balance Rehabilitation Center at North Shore Medical Center offers evidence-based assessments and treatments to improve vestibular and balance disorders, in addition to identifying early risk for falls. Vestibular and balance disorders are serious medical conditions that can lead to falls resulting in injuries that can be fatal.

The center aims to prevent falls and their associated injuries by treating dizziness and balance disorders, which can be caused by hearing and vision problems, ear infections, muscle weakness, and loss of sensation in the feet or joints. The Vestibular and Balance Rehabilitation Center's multidisciplinary healthcare team is trained specifically in balance disorders that often occur in patients that have or experience acoustic neuroma; migraine associated dizziness; stroke and other neurological disorders; multiple sclerosis; leg and ankle fractures; trauma; cranial radiation; vestibular neuritis; parkinson's disease; vertigo; alcoholic degeneration; syncope; and unsteady gait with a history of falls.

For more information about the Vestibular and Balance Rehabilitation Center at North Shore Medical Center please call 305-835-6155.