

How Chiropractic Care Can Help Prevent Falls



Every year, people injure themselves needlessly in slip-and-fall accidents. One million adults over age 25 will be injured in falls at home this year.¹ In serious cases, a fall can cause long-term disability or even death. What can we do to protect ourselves, our parents, and our families? Here are some facts and tips, courtesy of the Virginia Chiropractic Association.

Be proactive. Do a survey, whether it's for your office, your home, or a loved one's home.

Safety strategies include:

- Beware mats and rugs on hard surfaces. Be sure to put a non-slip surface beneath any stepping surface that may otherwise slip.
- In the bathroom, be especially aware (and see the above tip on carpets and mats). Deaths in the bathroom exceed those due to handgun accidents.² If safety "grab bars" are present, check them (or have them checked) periodically for stability.
- Secure electrical cords. Be sure cords are out of the way when possible, and secure them when re-routing is not an option. Consider hiring an electrician if necessary; or make a simple trip to the hardware store for a conduit strip that mounts to the floor, safely.
- Mind toys and pets. Be sure kids clean up after themselves. If you have pets, walk with care.
- Take an extra moment on the stairs... especially the top and bottom one.

Also, beware outdoor hazards. Be sure ladders are secure, and use them as directed. Tie shoelaces, and consider double-knotting. In colder climes, ice is a common hazard; but an oil patch in a parking lot, or spill in a grocery store aisle, can wreak havoc during any season. Be alert. Finally, address any yard hazards (holes, chunks of material, uneven ground, sprinkler heads stuck in the "up" position). The hassle of correcting the hazard will be less than the pain of a fall.

Did you know that your balance is related not only to your ears and eyes, but also to your feet, your knees, your spine, and the nervous system that controls all of these? Diabetics commonly suffer from decreased feedback from feet, and they are at corresponding risk for falls.³ Seniors may have deficits in middle ear function ("vestibular system"), as well as poor feedback from malfunctioning or arthritic knees, hips, and spines. The neck is especially important when it comes to balance, and arthritis and other motion-deficits in the neck can severely impact normal balance.⁴ Doctors of chiropractic are uniquely trained in assessing and normalizing joint function; and with that process, they affect the function of the nervous system. A well-coordinated nervous system means a well-coordinated YOU! And a well-coordinated you is a safer, happier you.

More than 40% of people hospitalized from hip fractures do not return home and are not capable of living independently again.⁵ According to the National Cancer institute, the lifetime incidence of invasive breast cancer is about 12.5% of all women.⁶ Compare that to the remaining lifetime risk of hip fracture for a 50 year-old, which is somewhere between 4 and 11% for a 50-year old man, and 13 - 22% for a woman.⁷ With the cause of breast cancer unclear, and the cause of hip fracture (osteoporosis and slip/fall accidents) more clear, it only makes sense to address the preventable. Simple exercise routines, along with retraining of joints and the nervous system, can help stack the odds in your family's favor.

Your doctor of chiropractic is your partner in living not just long, but well. To help you minimize or prevent future problems, or to help your family live better, please contact us.

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References:

1 <http://www.stopfalls.org/>

2 <http://icadi.php.ufl.edu/2003/presentation.php?PresID=152>

3 NOTE: Diabetics of both Type I & Type II varieties will benefit from a variety of exercise regimens that affects not only balance, but cellular metabolism and response to insulin.

4 Wrisley, Diane M, et. al. Cervicogenic Dizziness: A Review of Diagnosis and Treatment. *Journal of Orthopaedic & Sports Physical Therapy* 2000;30(12):755-766

5 <http://www.stopfalls.org/>

6 <http://www.seer.cancer.gov/studies/surveillance/study7.html>

7 Oden et al. Lifetime risk of hip fractures is underestimated. *Osteoporos Int.* 1998;8(6):599-603.