

# When Balance Counts

*Falling is associated with aging, but falls aren't a natural part of aging process.*

by Justin Weisbrod  
Community contributor

**A** afraid of falling? Fallen in the past and not wanting to participate in activities? While falling is associated with aging, falls are not a natural part of the aging process.

However, falls are a major threat to the health and independence of older adults, people ages 55 and older. Each year nearly one-third of older adults experience a fall.

The good news is that falls can be prevented. There are risk factors associated with age related falls, such as physical inactivity, lifestyle, hazards in the home, poor posture, health problems, medications and vision.

As the number of risk factors increase, so does the possibility a fall will occur. The opportunity to help reduce falls among older adults has never been better. Effective fall interventions reduce fall risk factors through either exercise alone or by

combining exercise with other risk reduction approaches such as medication review and management, vision screening and correction, education, and safer living environments.

Any kind of physical activity incorporated into daily living is beneficial, but the kinds of activities most often recommended to prevent falling include endurance, strength, balance and flexibility.

Endurance activities will improve stamina for daily activities such as house work, grocery shopping or outings with friends and family.

Strength activities help improve functional ability for getting out of a chair or even opening a jar. Strength activities can be done using stretch bands or some type of weight.

Balance activities help reduce falls and fear of falling by improving postural stability and strengthening large leg muscles and ankles.

Flexibility and stretching activities keep the body limber and improve range of motion. Flexible muscles make most activities of daily living such as dressing and picking up objects easier.

Physical therapy can give the exercise programs that focus on preventing falls and will emphasize endurance, strength, balance and flexibility. In physical therapy patients can get instruction from licensed therapists who are experienced in treating many of the factors that contribute to the risk of falling.

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## BY THE NUMBERS Falls Among Older Adults Statistics

ANNUALLY

**1 in 3**

Adults ages 65 and older falls

IN 2010

**2.3**

Million fall injuries were treated in ERs.

IN 2010

**\$30**

Billion was direct medical cost of falls

IN 2010

**258K**

Hip fractures from falls.

## AN OVERVIEW: Falls Among Older Adults

Each year, one in every three adults ages 65 and older falls, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Falls can cause moderate to severe injuries, such as hip fractures and head traumas.

- One out of three older adults (those ages 65 and older) falls each year, but less than half talk to their healthcare providers about it.
- Among older adults, falls are the leading cause of both fatal and nonfatal injuries.
- In 2010, 2.3 million nonfatal fall injuries among older adults were treated in emergency rooms. —[cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)

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