

# newsletter

Eldercare Programme

41st Edition | November 2023

medical  
aid  
society  
*there when you need us.*



## PREVENTION OF FALLS FOR THE ELDERLY

*This newsletter is for your general information and is not a substitute for medical advice. You should contact your doctor with any questions about your health, treatment or care.*

Falling is among the most serious challenges facing elderly persons and is associated with mortality, injury and reduced functioning and independence.

Conditions such as osteoporosis that commonly affect the elderly and age-related physical decline (e.g. slower reflexes) worsen fall-related injuries in people over the age of 65. Approximately 5% of elderly persons who fall require hospital admission.

Risk factors for falling are classified as **intrinsic** and **extrinsic factors**.

Intrinsic factors include:

- past history of a fall, stroke or other medical conditions (e.g. dysrhythmia)
- lower body weakness
- ageing
- cognitive impairment, such as forgetfulness
- balance problems
- medication
- poor vision.

Extrinsic factors refer to obstacles in places where we live and spend time, poor footwear and other similar restraints.

continued overleaf >

## Recommendations to reduce your risk of falling

If you have experienced a fall recently or feel that you are at risk of falling, we recommend that you arrange a visit to your doctor to discuss your concerns. Your doctor will take a history of your conditions and medication, do a thorough examination and discuss a plan to prevent falls.

This may include some of the following recommendations:

- keeping a diary of when you experienced poor balance or when you feared that you might fall
- muscle strengthening and balance retraining exercises may be done by a physiotherapist or occupational therapist
- gait training to improve your ability to stand and walk and the use of walking aids and assisting devices
- changing or discontinuing medication that may pose a risk for falling, as your risk increases with the amount of medication used
- installing bedrails to prevent falling off the bed
- hip protectors
- vitamin D and calcium supplements
- assessing your home and looking at ways to make it safer.

### Top tips!

1. **Physical activity** can go a long way toward fall prevention. Check with your doctor which activities are suitable for you, such as walking, dancing, gardening, swimming or *tai chi*.
2. **Wear sensible shoes** – properly fitted, sturdy, flat shoes with non-skid soles are the best option and reduce joint pain.
3. **Light up your living space**, as brightly lit areas will help you avoid tripping over objects that are hard to see.
4. **Use assistive devices/aids** if your doctor recommends a cane or walker to keep you steady, handrails and grab bars around the house and a sturdy plastic seat for the shower or bath.

### *Tai chi*

Studies have shown that this ancient Chinese martial art form can provide significantly greater improvements in this areas. It improves your mood, balance, strength and flexibility and reduces your fear of falling.

Tai chi is an accessible form of exercise, and you don't have to be fit or a specific age to get started. Therefore, it's an appropriate exercise for older people as it's easier on your joints and muscles and can easily be adapted for people with disabilities.

Consult the Member Guide or the Society's website at [www.bpmas.co.za](http://www.bpmas.co.za) for benefits relating to osteopathy, prostheses, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, external appliances and walking aids, etc.



### Sources

Hello Doctor  
Mayo Clinic  
Metropolitan Health