

Calvary Community Care

Keep Active, Stay Strong

Falls and Injury Prevention – How not to fall for it



Maintain a healthy and active lifestyle, with regular exercise to prevent your muscles weakening and joints stiffening.

In people aged 65 years and older falls are the leading cause of injury. Most elderly people fall in and around the home. Falls can have serious consequences. Physical activity is important for our health and wellbeing at any age. It improves muscle strength and balance so you feel good, stay strong, look well and enjoy life.

Benefits of Physical Activity

Strength, flexibility, balance and reaction time are considered the most easily fixed risk factors for falls. Our bodies were designed to move.

Physical activity also reduces the risk of falls. It can:

- improve balance. Good balance is needed to move about confidently and safely, both inside and outside the home.
- improve muscle strength and flexibility
- keep bones strong
- increase energy levels

- help with sleeping problems
- help to control blood pressure, blood sugar levels and weight
- help you feel good about life

The link between exercise and decreased falls in older people living in the community is well-established. There is also good evidence that disability can be reduced by well-designed exercise programmes. For example, Tai Chi can reduce falls by 37% and the New Zealand developed, Otago Exercise Programme by 32%.

Activities that build muscle strength and balance will help you stay steady on your feet. These include:

- exercise groups that focus on strength and balance and include some standing activities
- exercise programs that have been designed especially for you by a physiotherapist or exercise physiologist, that you can do at home or with assistance
- Tai Chi or dancing.



What you can do

- Discuss options for activities to improve your balance and strength with your doctor.
 - Ask a Physiotherapist or Exercise Physiologist about activities that are suitable for you and how to manage any pain you might have. A physiotherapist can also advise you about whether a walking aid, such as a stick or frame, would help you. Using a walking aid can increase your steadiness and confidence to walk more. It is important that walking aids are properly adjusted for you, and that they are properly maintained (e.g. replace worn stoppers).
 - Find out about activities close to you and choose one you will enjoy.
 - Begin your new activity gradually. Start at a level that suits you and build up over time.
 - Be physically active every day. Whatever your age, aim to do at least 30 minutes of activity, at least 5 times a week.
 - The activity should make you breathe a bit faster and your heart pump a bit harder, but you should still be able to talk while doing the activity.
- Exercises and activities that make you both stronger and improve your balance lower the risk of having a fall e.g. Tai Chi, dancing or group exercise programs that include balance and muscle strengthening.
 - Talk to your doctor if your health problems or pain make you worried about attempting more activity.
 - If you have osteoarthritis, being active helps to control pain, weakness and stiffness.



Also:

- eat healthy and nutritious food
- drink enough fluids – 2 litres per day (8 large cups), unless your doctor has recommended a fluid restriction.

Need support? Calvary Community Care can support safe, independent living at home with a variety of services and expert advice. Call 1300 66 00 22 for more information.

Who can help?

Your doctor can refer you to specific allied health professionals in your area.

Physiotherapists. A typical session with a physiotherapist is unique to a patient's needs and their health condition. Treatment also depends on the scope of practice of the physiotherapist. A 'typical' session may involve:

- Assessing and diagnosing the patient's condition and needs.
- Working with the patient to set and attain goals – whether that's maintaining mobility and independence in aged care to running a marathon
- Developing a treatment or prevention plan that will take into account lifestyle, activities and general health and prescribing exercise and physical aides if required.

Exercise Physiologists specialise in the benefits of exercise to help patients get fitter for all around good health, or to treat patients with a medical condition through exercise. They are much more than an ordinary personal trainer at the gym. Exercise physiologists study at university and have a wide range of knowledge about the human body and the benefit that exercise has on it, both mentally and physically. They can prescribe a course of exercises for either fitness or rehabilitation. Exercise physiologists can treat medical conditions such as obesity, arthritis, diabetes, cancer, osteoporosis, depression, asthma and cardiovascular diseases, as well as other conditions.

Dietician or Nutritionist. Both Nutritionists and Dietitians aim to assist in a person's journey to reaching optimal health through food and nutrition. The main difference between the two professions is that only a Dietitian (with an accreditation from the Dietitians Association of Australia) is qualified to provide medical nutrition therapy or clinical nutrition consultations in either an individual or group setting.

<https://daa.asn.au/smart-eating-for-you/>

My Aged Care gives you access to a range of information and support which can be delivered to you in your home. It is for people 65yrs+, or 50yrs+ for an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person.

www.myagedcare.gov.au or ph. 1800 200 422.

Arthritis Association for information about exercising with arthritis.

Infoline: 1800 011 041 or <http://www.arthritisaustralia.com.au/index.php/contact-us.html>

Gyms Some gyms offer classes specifically for older people (may also be suitable for a person with a disability). These classes focus on strength and resistance training, balance, exercises good for optimising heart and lungs function, and some offer the opportunity to exercise in the pool.

Local Councils for information on activities in your area.

Community Health Centres and Day Therapy Centres can offer physiotherapy (and some other allied health services). They may also have a Falls Clinic which is a specialist clinic which sees people who have fallen. The aim is to discover why your fall happened and to treat any underlying problems that may increase your chances of falling. The health of your bones will also be assessed, as you may be at particular risk of having a fracture.

Independent Living Centre provides information about products and services to help people remain independent and improve their quality of life.

ilcaustralia.org.au or ph. 1300 885 886

Your local library for booklets or videos on exercise for older people.

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References

Nutrition Australia

'Nutritionist or Dietitian – which is for me?'

<http://bit.ly/2obdXeU>

Health Times

'What is an Exercise Physiologist?'

<http://bit.ly/2niHxBS>

Australian Physiotherapy Association

<http://bit.ly/1RUvqQ3>

Otago Exercise Programme

<http://bit.ly/1cKhlnX>

ACC

'Standing up to Falls'

<http://bit.ly/2niHAgX>

My Aged Care

'Preventing Falls in the Elderly'

<http://bit.ly/2nOiacx>

Revised and re-published by the Commonwealth of Australia 2011

'Don't Fall For It – A guide to preventing falls for older people'

<http://bit.ly/2nQD5br>

AFP The Elderly Dec 2012

'Falls Prevention in Older Adults Assessment and Management'

<http://bit.ly/1kQw8xB>

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