

Calvary Community Care Stay Healthy

Falls and Injury Prevention – How not to fall for it



Even short-term illnesses (such as the flu and other infections) or surgery can temporarily increase the risk of falling.

As we grow older, changes in our body such as vision problems, weakening muscles and stiffening joints can increase our chances of falling. Falls can also be a sign of a new health problem, medication side effects or balance problems.



Vitamin D

We need vitamin D to maintain good health and to keep bones and muscles strong and healthy. Vitamin D forms in the skin when it is exposed to UV from sunlight. It can also be obtained from some foods. Vitamin D helps the body to absorb calcium. Deficiency is thought to be common in Australia.

Who is at risk of vitamin D deficiency? Some people may not be able to access the sun exposure required to help them maintain their vitamin D levels. These groups may be at risk of vitamin D deficiency. They include:

- naturally dark skinned people – who need more UV exposure to produce adequate levels of vitamin D as the pigment in their skin reduces UV penetration
- people who cover their skin for religious or cultural reasons
- frail/elderly, chronically ill or institutionalised people who live mostly indoors
- people who are obese
- babies and infants of vitamin D deficient mothers
- people taking certain medications, or have conditions causing poor absorption of calcium and vitamin D
- people who avoid sun exposure because they have previously had skin cancer or are at high risk of skin cancer.

People in these groups should consult their doctor for advice on whether they need to take a vitamin D supplement.



Reduced benzodiazepine use

Benzodiazepines are medicines that help relieve nervousness, tension, and other symptoms. They are a type of anti-anxiety drug. While anxiety is a normal response to stressful situations, you may be someone who has unusually high levels of anxiety that can interfere with everyday life. For you, benzodiazepines can help bring your feelings under control. The medicine can also relieve troubling symptoms of anxiety, such as pounding heartbeat, breathing problems, irritability, nausea, and feeling faint.

The list below shows some of the different generic (in blue) and brand names (in black) of benzodiazepines:

Diazepam – Valium, Ducene, Antenex

Oxazepam – Serepax, Murelax, Alepam

Nitrazepam – Mogadon, Alodorm

Temazepam – Euhypnos, Normison, Temaze

Lorazepam – Ativan

Flunitrazepam – Rohypnol, Hypnodorm

Bromazepam – Lexotan

Clonazepam – Rivotril

Doctors may sometimes prescribe these medications for other conditions, such as muscle spasms, epilepsy and other seizure disorders, phobias, panic disorder, and sleeping problems. There is strong evidence to suggest they can increase the risk of falls.

If you are experiencing unwanted side effects from these medications please consult your doctor immediately. Do not suddenly cease taking your medication without medical advice as it could cause serious issues for your health. Take medications only as prescribed.



Sensory and balance problems

Discuss these problems with your GP. They may be due to degenerative changes sometimes

associated with ageing, unwanted side effects of medications or a new health problem and can include:

- muscle weakness
- vision impairment or blindness
- poor balance
- reduced sensation.



Vision Impairment

Vision impairment is a risk factor for falls and fractures. Multifocal spectacles increase falls risk by distorting the lower visual field. Active adults who undertake regular outdoor activity can reduce their falls risk by using single lens distance glasses instead of multifocals when going outside or to an unfamiliar environment. This advice however, increases falls risk in less active adults. There are various conditions of the eye which can affect vision e.g. cataracts (causing blurred/hazy vision), macular degeneration (loss of central vision). Any disturbances in your vision should be referred to your GP.



Chronic diseases can also increase your risk of falling

These include:

- Stroke
- incontinence
- Parkinson's disease
- dementia
- delirium
- hypotension (low blood pressure)
- diabetes
- arthritis
- anxiety and/or depression
- osteoporosis.

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.



Influenza (The 'Flu)

Ensure you have the flu vaccine annually. The flu vaccine is recommended for everyone from six months of age, but is available free under the National Immunisation Program for people who face a high risk from influenza and its complications. Discuss this with your doctor or go to Department of Health Immunise Australia Programme website: <http://bit.ly/1kU4a3K>.

Who can help?

CCC local service centre can organise extra services to assist you with your medications, or anything else you require, whether short or long term.

Your doctor can give you information about flu vaccines, medication and side effects, as well as speak with you about alternatives to some medications (e.g. sleeping tablets). Your doctor can change or cease medications. Your doctor can also refer you for a Home Medicine Review. This is a free service where the Pharmacist comes to your home to speak with you about all of your medications. You can also speak with your doctor about any chronic conditions or sensory and balance problems you may have.

Pharmacists can give you information about your medication, how to take it and any side effects. They can also provide information about dosettes and blister packs, as well as take a thorough look at your medications and discuss any issues with you and then advise your doctor. (Known as a medication review this can either be undertaken, free of charge, in the Pharmacy or as a Home Medication Review – see above).

Optometrists can review your glasses prescription and test for certain eye diseases.

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.

References

Department of Health

'Immunise Australia Programme Influenza (Flu)'
<http://bit.ly/1kU4a3K>

NSW Health

'Benzodiazepines' Fact Sheet
<http://bit.ly/2nyzBt4>

Cancer Council Vitamin D

<http://bit.ly/1eKC5ML>

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/2oSBy4k>

AFP The Elderly Dec 2012

'Falls Prevention in Older Adults Assessment and Management'
<http://bit.ly/1kQw8xB>

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare

'Preventing Falls and Harm from Falls. Best Practice Guidelines for Australian Community Care 2009'
<http://bit.ly/2o3AJZv>

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