



MONMOUTH COUNTY OFFICE ON AGING

Senior NewsLines

Jointly funded by the Monmouth County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the New Jersey Division of Aging and Community Services, Department of Health & Senior Services
John A. Wanat, Executive Director



Falls and Older Adults

About Falls

Many people have a friend or relative who has fallen. The person may have slipped while walking or felt dizzy and fallen when standing up from a chair. Maybe you've fallen yourself.

If you or an older person you know has fallen, you're not alone. More than one in three people age 65 years or older falls each year. The risk of falling -- and fall-related problems -- rises with age.

Each year, more than 1.6 million older U.S. adults go to emergency departments for fall-related injuries. Among older adults, falls are the number one cause of fractures, hospital admissions for trauma, loss of independence, and injury deaths.

Fractures caused by falls can lead to hospital stays and disability. Most often, fall-related fractures are in the person's hip, pelvis, spine, arm, hand, or ankle.

Hip fractures are one of the most serious types of fall injury. They are a leading cause of medical problems and death among older adults. Only half of older adults hospitalized for a broken hip can return home or live on their own after the injury. Osteoporosis, a disease that involves loss of bone mass, increases the chance of hip and other fractures if a person falls.

Many older adults are afraid of falling. This fear becomes more common as people age, even among those who haven't fallen. It may lead older people to avoid activities such as walking, shopping, or taking part in social activities.

If you're worried about falling, talk with your doctor or another health care provider. Your doctor might refer you to a physical therapist, or PT. A PT can help you improve your balance and walking and help build your walking confidence. Getting rid of your fear of falling can help you to stay active, maintain your physical health, and prevent future falls.

If you fall, be sure to discuss the fall with your doctor, even if you aren't hurt. Many underlying causes of falls can be treated or corrected. For example, falls can be a sign of a problem with your medicines that can be corrected. They can also be a sign of a manageable disease or other problem, such as diabetes or low blood pressure when you stand.

After a fall, your doctor may suggest physical therapy, use of a walking aid, or other steps to help prevent future falls. These steps can also make you more confident in your abilities.

Exercise to improve your balance and strengthen your muscles helps to prevent falls. Changing your medicines or your eyewear prescription can help, too. You can also make your home safer to avoid falling.

Falls are not an inevitable part of life, even as a person gets older. You can take action to prevent falls. Your doctor or other health care providers can help you decide what changes will help. (continued)

Your reflexes may also be slower than when you were younger. The increased amount of time it takes you to react may make it harder to catch your balance if you start to fall.

Foot problems that cause painful feet, and wearing unsafe footwear can increase your chance of falling. Backless shoes and slippers, high-heeled shoes, and shoes with smooth leather soles are examples of unsafe footwear that could cause a fall.

Sensory problems can cause falls, too. If your senses don't work well, you might be less aware of your environment. For instance, having numb feet may mean you don't sense where you are stepping.

Not seeing well can also result in falls. One reason is that it may take a while for your eyes to adjust to see clearly when you move between darkness and light.

Other vision problems include poor depth perception, cataracts, and glaucoma. Wearing multi-focal glasses while walking or having poor lighting around your home can also lead to falls.

Confusion, even for a short while, can sometimes lead to falls. For example, if you wake up in an unfamiliar environment, you might feel unsure of where you are. If you feel confused, wait for your mind to clear or until someone comes before trying to get up and walk around.

Medication use can increase a person's risk of falling, too. Sometimes the increased risk is because of the health problems for which the person takes the medications. In other cases, medications cause side effects like dizziness or confusion. Drug interactions can also lead to falls.

The more medications you take the more likely you are to fall. People who take four or more prescription drugs have a greater risk of falling than do people who take fewer drugs.

Never add or stop taking medications without talking with your doctor first. Also, ask your doctor if changes in your medications could lower your risk of falls. Your doctor can tell you which drugs, including over-the-counter medicines, might cause problems.

Be sure to talk with your doctor if you fall, as well. A fall could be a sign of a medical problem such as an infection or a cardiovascular disorder. It could also suggest that a chronic ailment, such as Parkinson's disease or dementia, is progressing.

Although falls can happen anywhere, well over half of all falls happen at home. Falls at home often happen while a person is doing normal daily activities. Some of these falls are caused by factors in the person's living environment. For instance, a slick floor or a poorly lit stairway may lead to a fall.

Other factors that can lead to falls at home include loose rugs, clutter on the floor or stairs, and carrying heavy or bulky things up or down stairs. Not having stair railings and not having grab bars in the bathroom can also result in falls. Simple changes can help make your home safer.



Beware of Another Medicare SCAM

Our office has been advised of telephone calls which are being made in which the caller verifies your name, address and the fact that you are on Medicare after which the caller advises that there are rule changes now in Congress and there are new Medical cards being made with newly assigned numbers which would be effective the first of the month.

The caller then asks if you have your Social Security check directly deposited into your bank account and if you answer yes the caller then asks you for your bank account number so everything can be verified at which time a new medical card would be printed with a new number and sent to you. Just hang up.

PREVENT AND TREAT ARTHRITIS WITH EXERCISE

By Pam Ford Keach

Chief of the California Department of Health Services'

California Arthritis Partnership Program

According to a recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 46 million Americans, or almost one in five adults, have arthritis. The term "arthritis" encompasses more than 100 diseases and conditions affecting joints and connective tissue, all of which have a significant impact on quality of life and healthy living (read more about the CDC statistics at <http://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/intervention>).

Arthritis currently limits the activities of 19 million adults. It is the leading cause of disability in the United States and contributes to high healthcare costs across the nation.

Among older Americans who report having difficulty walking or shopping, arthritis is frequently the leading cause of their mobility difficulty, and many elders experience costly treatment for disabling chronic joint symptoms.

Being overweight is strongly associated with increased risk for both the development and progression of arthritis, particularly osteoarthritis. Among adults who are obese or overweight, the prevalence of arthritis almost doubles when compared with adults who are of a normal weight. Obese adults, in fact, are up to four times more likely to develop knee osteoarthritis than adults of normal weight. Maintaining a healthy weight may reduce the risk of developing arthritis or it may slow the progression of the disease; research has shown that weight loss – an average of 11 pounds – may reduce the risk of developing knee osteoarthritis by as much as 50 percent.

Having arthritis, and the pain it causes, may create a barrier to the adoption of healthy lifestyle behaviors. Yet physical activity benefits people with arthritis in many ways. Research has shown that exercise reduces joint pain, improves function, and delays disability. The physical activity recommendation for people with arthritis is 30 minutes of moderate exercise at least three times per week. Engaging in physical activity in 10 – minute intervals is a great way to start.

Early diagnosis and appropriate management of arthritis, including regular exercise and self-management activities, can help people with arthritis decrease pain, improve function, stay productive, and lower healthcare costs. Key self-management activities include developing the skills and confidence to manage arthritis on a day-to-day basis; being active; watching one's weight; seeing a doctor regularly; and protecting one's joints.

AARP TAX HELP AVAILABLE

February 22-April 16

Thurs. 9:00 am-3:30 pm

Sat. 9:00 am-12:30 pm

Mon. 9:00 am-3:30 pm

Tues. 6:00-8:15 pm

Headquarters, Manalapan

February 20-April 7

Mon/Tues/Fri – 1:00-4:00 pm

Sat. 9:30-12:30 pm (Mar. 31/Apr. 7)

Wall Township Branch



Check with your local library to determine if this program is being offered in your town.



Arthritis Walk

Walk to help fight our nation's #1 cause of disability!

**2007 Monmouth/Ocean Arthritis Walk at Jenkinson's Pavilion
Sunday, April 29, 2007 at 10am**

Walk with us this spring

The Arthritis Walk® is the Arthritis Foundation's annual nationwide event that raises awareness and funds to fight arthritis, the nation's leading cause of disability. It is a tremendous opportunity to help improve the lives of the 46 million men, women and children doctor-diagnosed with arthritis. Get your company involved or recruit friends and family members to form a team. Best of all, walk in honor of a loved one with arthritis and know you're making a difference by raising funds to support Arthritis Foundation research, public health and public policy efforts to improve the lives of people with arthritis.

At the Event...

- " Choose from a three-mile or one-mile walk route
- " Write an inspirational message on the Wall of Heroes
- " Wear a blue "hero" hat if you have arthritis
- " Enjoy the fun, festivities and free health information

Register Today

Register online today! Once you register, you can set up your own personal Web page and begin fund raising. Raise \$100 or more and earn an official Arthritis Walk® T-shirt. Go to www.arthritis.org and register online.

**Monmouth County Office on Aging
P.O. Box 1255
21 Main and Court Center
Freehold, NJ 07728**

