

# The Importance of Fall Prevention

## A GROWING PROBLEM

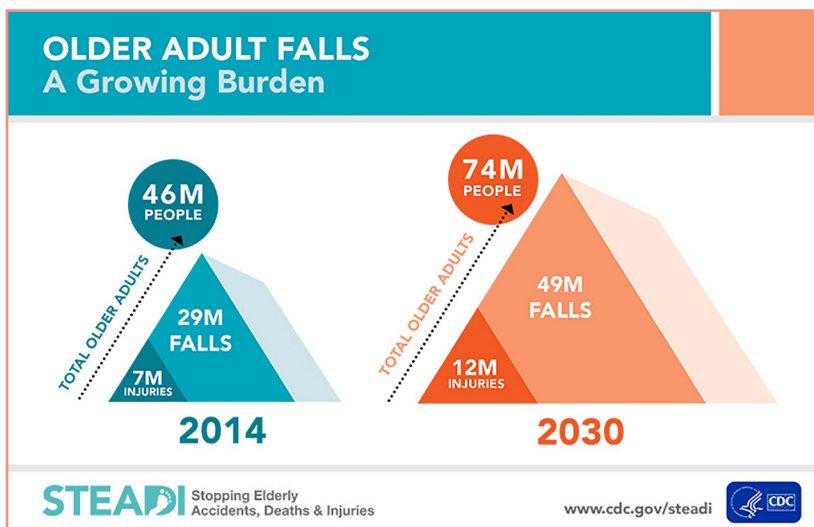
In 2015, overall health care costs in the US related to falls surpassed the \$50 billion mark. Recent estimates predict costs will reach \$67 billion by 2020, rising each subsequent year as we approach mid-century.<sup>1</sup> Among older adults aging in place, approximately 30% will experience a serious fall within a given year. Roughly one in five of these falls require medical attention, and nearly one in ten results in a fracture.<sup>2</sup>

## RISK FACTORS

Several factors put polio survivors at particular risk for falling:

- lower-extremity weakness
- fatigue
- decreased mobility
- joint pain
- poor balance
- use of multiple medications

The RRTC study mentioned previously found that 86% of those who fell were concerned about falling again, and 84% reported limiting their activity because of a fear of falling. The psychological toll of falling can lead to a loss of self-confidence in one's ability to perform routine daily activities. This can lead to social withdrawal, isolation and depression, which, in turn, can lead to further weakness, decreased mobility and an increased dependence on caregivers to complete activities of daily living (ADLs). These things can have a negative effect on one's overall health. Inactivity can raise the likelihood of developing cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity and depression. This can lead to a decrease in quality of life, an increase in health care costs and an accelerated mortality risk.<sup>5</sup>



Polio survivors, especially those with notable lower-leg weakness, are at an even greater risk. When the Healthy Aging Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) at the University of Washington surveyed 2,000 individuals with various neuromuscular diseases, they found that 55% of those with PPS had fallen within the prior six months.<sup>3</sup>

Besides the associated financial burden, falls may result in injuries that have a significant impact on an individual's health years from the initial incident. More than 95% of hip fractures are caused by falling. Falls are also the most common cause of traumatic brain injuries (TBI). A new study published last month found an increased risk of death for up to 10 years after a non-hip fracture.<sup>4</sup>

## STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

Though the statistics are sobering, one needn't give in to despair. There are several simple steps you can take to decrease your risk of falling:

- Use appropriate assistive devices. Talk to your doctor to see if you may benefit from using a brace, cane, walker or scooter.
- Eliminate risks in your home. Remove obstructions and clutter from walkways, make sure stairs are well-lit, remove throw rugs, wear socks or footwear with grippy material on the bottom, and install handrails and grab bars where needed.

- ❑ Ask your doctor to review your medications.
- ❑ Engage in exercise that promotes better balance and flexibility, such as tai-chi or yoga.
- ❑ Take sufficient breaks between activities so that you don't become overly fatigued.
- ❑ Have your vision checked.

These steps are no guarantee that you won't fall, of course, but taken together, they may dramatically cut down on the chances of injuring yourself in a fall. ■

For more resources on preventing falls, visit the CDC's website at [www.cdc.gov/steady/patient.html](http://www.cdc.gov/steady/patient.html).

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