

Falls Prevention Awareness

As the nation observed Falls Prevention Awareness Day on September 22, the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) urged older adults to schedule a balance and falls assessment with a physical therapist to reduce risk of falls and related injuries.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than one third of adults ages 65 and older fall each year in the United States. Falls are the leading cause of deaths due to injuries and the most common cause of nonfatal injuries and hospital admissions for trauma for the aging population.

"Too many people erroneously consider falls a normal consequence of growing old," says physical therapist and APTA spokesperson Judith Daniel, PT, MS, GCS. "It's simply not true. There are evidence-based interventions that can help reduce their risk of falling and reduce falls-related injuries. A comprehensive examination that includes a balance assessment performed by a physical therapist can be effective in determining the factors that are contributing to an individual's loss of mobility, risk for falls, and/or decreased confidence. Once this information has been gathered, the physical therapist can then determine which type of muscle strengthening and balance retraining program would be most beneficial to reduce the individual's risk of falling."

In addition to adhering to a program designed specifically by a physical therapist, older adults should:

- Ask all health care providers to review their medicines -- both prescription and over-the counter -- to reduce side effects and interactions.
- Have their eyes checked by an eye doctor at least once a year.
- Reduce hazards and improve the lighting in their homes.

Older adults who use canes and walkers as walking aids should also be properly assessed and fitted by a physical therapist to avoid fall-related injuries.

The following are general recommendations for older adults who use walking aids can help reduce falls (See APTA's New Tip Sheet on Proper Fit of Walking Aids):

- The walker or cane should be about the height of your wrists when your arms are at your sides.
- When using a walker, your arms should be slightly bent when holding on, but you shouldn't have to bend forward at the waist to reach it.
- Periodically check the rubber tips at the bottom of the cane or walker. Be sure to replace them if they are uneven or worn through.

Falls Awareness Day, hosted by the National Council on Aging, is observed on the first day of fall to promote and increase public awareness about how to prevent and reduce falls among older adults

Source: APTA (American Physical Therapy Association)