



**Medical
Blueprints**

PREVENTING ELDERLY FALLS: SAVING LIVES AND MONEY REPORT #2911

BACKGROUND: Falls are the leading cause of injury-related visits to emergency rooms in the United States, and the primary cause of accidental deaths in those over the age of 65. Falls can be the indication of poor health and declining function, and often associated with significant morbidity. More than 90 percent of hip fractures occur because of falls, with most of them happening in persons over 70 years of age. There are risk factors for falling that include increasing age, medication use, cognitive impairment, and sensory deficits. Evaluation of a patient who has fallen includes a focused history with an emphasis on medications, a physical examination and simple tests of postural control and overall physical function. Treatment is targeted at the underlying cause of the fall and one that can help return the patient to baseline function.

(Source: <https://www.aafp.org/afp/2000/0401/p2159.html>)

PREVENTING ELDERLY FALLS: There are ways to lower the chances of the elderly falling and the first place to start is around their home. Things like getting rid of throw rugs and making sure the carpet is even; being sure furniture won't topple if grabbed for support; improving lighting; installing grab bars where they might be needed (near toilets and showers); and wearing an electronic pendent with a button to push to call for help. Another way is to take regular exercise classes that include moves or postures that require balance, such as yoga or tai chi. And integrating balance and strength practice into everyday life like standing on one foot while brushing your teeth or standing with one foot in front of the other. Other important factors include drinking water and eating foods with vitamin D to increase muscle strength, as well as getting screened for osteoporosis. Having your eyes checked yearly and avoiding sleeping pills and anti-anxiety medication that can reduce concentration are important. Instead try warm milk, hot chamomile tea, or listen to soft music to relax.

(Source: <https://www.center4research.org/prevent-falls-older-people/>)

STATES TAKING ACTION: To prevent and reduce falls, states have adopted legislation that includes supporting older adults in their homes, communities, and clinical settings. California enacted SB 280 in 2019 requiring the state's Department of Housing and Community Development to investigate possible changes to building standards. The legislation allows the department to incorporate changes to the residential code if the requirements do not significantly increase the cost of construction. Connecticut, New Mexico, New York and Washington established statewide fall prevention programs dedicated to raising awareness and providing resources to older adults. Minnesota requires unlicensed personnel in assisted living facilities to complete fall prevention training, and Washington requires long-term care workers to complete core competency training, which includes fall prevention training. According to a 2019 report from the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Aging, cross-cutting interventions that include multiple facets such as education and awareness, physical mobility and addressing home safety increase the effectiveness of the interventions. State policymakers can consider these cross-cutting interventions and use them to create or modify statewide initiatives to reduce falls, improve health outcomes and reduce health costs.

(Source: <https://www.ncsl.org/research/health/elderly-falls-prevention-legislation-and-statutes.aspx>)

✉ **For More Information, Contact:**

Judy Martin Finch, PR
martinju@wustl.edu

Diane Duke Williams, PR
williamsdia@wustl.edu

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