



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Staying Upright

*Deaths from Falls Among Persons Aged ≥ 65 Years — United States, 2007-2016
Recorded: May 15, 2018; posted: May 17, 2018*

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Jeffrey Nemhauser] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm Dr. Jeffrey Nemhauser, filling in for your host, Dr. Kathleen Dooling.

As the U.S. population ages, more people are at risk for injuries. The largest percentage of injury-related deaths among this group are caused by falls.

Elizabeth Burns is with CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. She's joining us today to discuss ways to prevent injuries and deaths from falls among senior adults. Welcome to the show, Elizabeth.

[Elizabeth Burns] Thanks for having me.

[Dr. Nemhauser] Elizabeth, what are some of the more common consequences when a senior adult falls?

[Elizabeth Burns] Well, first, it's important to note that falls are incredibly common. More than one in four older adults will fall in a given year. Common consequences include loss of independence and an increased fear of falling, as older adults are afraid to do the same kinds of activities they were doing before. And this can actually lead to more falls, as older adults have less strength in their lower body. Common consequences include hip fracture and traumatic brain injury. And ultimately, in 2016, almost 30,000 older adults died because of a fall.

[Dr. Nemhauser] So, are falls more common in men or in women?

[Elizabeth Burns] Falls are more common in women and more women go to the emergency department because of a fall and more women die because of a fall. However, the rate of fall deaths are more common in men than women. What this means is that, out of 100,000 men, more will die from a fall than out of 100,000 women.

[Dr. Nemhauser] What are the most common causes of falls among older people?

[Elizabeth Burns] Getting on and off the toilet and getting in and out of bed are common causes of falls. Walking around the hallways at night when the lights are off is a common way people fall. There's also an increased amount of medications used in seniors which have side effects, like making them light headed, and that increases the risk of falls and is a common cause.

[Dr. Nemhauser] With all of those factors, what are some ways our listeners can decrease their chances of falling?

[Elizabeth Burns] Older adults should talk to their health care provider or doctor about how they can decrease their chances of falling. This can be done during the annual wellness visit or during annual physicals. The doctor will recommend an exercise program that should increase strength and balance, or maybe refer you to a physical therapist. Additionally, they can look through your medications and perhaps reduce your doses or suggest medications that decrease your chances of falls.

[Dr. Nemhauser] Are there things we can do to modify our homes to prevent falling?

[Elizabeth Burns] Oh absolutely. Installing grab bars on the side of the toilet, making sure that rugs are taped down or removed, making sure that there's lighting in the hallways are all really simple ways that an older adult can modify their home to prevent falls.

[Dr. Nemhauser] Where can listeners go to get more information about preventing falls?

[Elizabeth Burns] Listeners can go to [cdc.gov/steady](https://www.cdc.gov/steady), and that's spelled s-t-e-a-d-i.

[Dr. Nemhauser] Thanks, Elizabeth. I've been talking today with Elizabeth Burns about ways to prevent fall-related injuries and deaths among senior adults.

Improving strength and agility through regular exercise and removing potential obstacles in the home can help decrease the risk for falls. If you or a loved one is older and struggle with mobility, talk with a health care provider about ways to decrease the risks for fall-related injuries and death.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Jeffrey Nemhauser for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.