

What You Need To Know About Falls

Falls are a major cause of injury, and even death, among elderly people. Factors that contribute to falls include lengthy convalescent periods in elderly patients, higher risks of incomplete recovery, and increasing physical disability.

Falls may be caused by environmental factors such as poor lighting, slippery throw rugs, highly waxed floors, and unfamiliar surroundings.

They often result from physiologic factors, such as temporary muscle paralysis, vertigo, orthostatic hypotension, central nervous system lesions, dementia, failing eyesight, and decreased strength and coordination.

At *West Jefferson Medical Center*, the nurse assesses the patient on admit and identifies those who are at risk for falls.

This is done by placing:

- ✓ A yellow clasp on the armband around the patient's wrist.
- ✓ A falling star on the foot of the bed.
- ✓ A falling star on the overhead light of the bed.
- ✓ A yellow sticker on the front of the patient's chart.

Preventing Falls

- ✓ Always keep the call light within reach.
- ✓ Make sure a night-light is on before going to bed.
- ✓ Place personal belongings (purse, wallet, books, tissue, urinal, commode, cane or walker) within easy reach.
- ✓ Rise slowly from a lying position to avoid possible dizziness and loss of balance.
- ✓ Keep bed in lowest position in order to reach the floor easier.
- ✓ Make sure the bed's wheels are locked.
- ✓ Wear sturdy, well-fitted, low-heeled shoes with non-slip soles.
- ✓ Wear non-skid footwear at night (stocking feet are slippery).

Preventing Wheelchair Falls

If in a wheelchair:

- ✓ Lock your brakes before you get out of the wheelchair.
- ✓ If you drop something on the floor, ask someone else to pick it up.
- ✓ Don't lean forward and tip yourself out.
- ✓ Move the footrests out of the way so you don't trip on them.

Who's At Risk For A Fall?

- ✓ Age 65 or older.
- ✓ Poor general health with chronic disease.
- ✓ A history of falls.
- ✓ Altered mental status.
- ✓ Decreased mobility.
- ✓ Improperly fitted shoes or slippers.
- ✓ Incontinence, urinary frequency, or diarrhea.
- ✓ Sensory deficits, particularly visual deficits.
- ✓ Neurological deficits.
- ✓ Taking drugs, such as diuretics, strong pain medications, hypnotics, and anti-psychotics.

Promoting Safety in the Home

To prevent falls at home:

- ✓ Secure all carpets and floor coverings around the edges, and tack down worn spots.
- ✓ Never use lightweight, loose mats or rugs on bare floors.
- ✓ Make sure potential hazards such as stairs are well-lit. White paint on either side of a staircase can enhance visibility.
- ✓ Install strong banisters along all indoor and outdoor steps.
- ✓ Use a bedside lamp or low wattage night-light in the bedroom to avoid having to wander around in the dark when getting out of bed.
- ✓ Fit secure handrails in convenient places in the shower, bathtub, and toilet. Use nonskid mats both inside and alongside every tub or shower.
- ✓ Minimize clutter. Store children's toys, especially those on wheels, when not in use.
- ✓ Walk carefully if a pet, such as a dog or a cat, is present.
- ✓ Secure wires from electrical appliances to walls or moldings.
- ✓ Store frequently used clothing and other items in places where they can be reached without standing on a stool or chair.
- ✓ Reduce the risk of accidental slips and falls by selecting well-fitting shoes with nonskid soles, by avoiding long robes, and by wearing glasses if needed.
- ✓ Sit on the edge of a bed or chair for a few minutes before rising.
- ✓ Use a walking stick, cane, or walker as required. Be sure to inspect the condition of all assistive devices prior to use.