



9350 E. Central
Wichita, KS 67206-2555

www.wichitaear.com

info@wichitaear.com

316-686-6608



WICHITA EAR CLINIC

Fall Prevention

Falls Are a Serious Problem

Falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries in people 65 and older in the United States. Falls can happen anytime and anyplace to people of any age, but most falls by people age 65 and older occur in the home during everyday activities. You can fall walking across a cluttered living room floor, in a slippery bathroom or while standing on a stool reaching into a cupboard.

The number of falls and the severity of injury resulting from falls increases as people get older. The most common serious injuries are head injuries, wrist fractures, spine fractures and hip fractures.

The cost of falls among older people is enormous because of the high death toll, disabling conditions and recovery in hospitals and rehabilitation institutions. The United States spends an estimated \$20.2 billion annually for the treatment of injuries to older people after falls. The majority of the cost is for hip fracture care, which averages \$35,000 per patient.

There is a pattern to falls among the elderly - the fear of falling, then injury, followed by hospitalization, decreased independence and mobility and often relocation to a nursing or residential institution. Falls can be a major life-changing event that robs you of your independence. Falls are not natural occurrences. **You can prevent falls.**

Facts About Falls

- There are nearly 1,000 hip fractures a day. **90% of the 350,000** hip fractures treated annually in the U.S. occur as a result of a fall.
- Approximately **25%** of hip fracture patients will make a full recovery; **40%** will require nursing home admission; **50%** will be dependent upon a cane or a walker; and **20%** will die in one year.
- The National Osteoporosis Foundation reports **35,700 deaths** each year from complications from hip fractures as a result of osteoporosis.
- Each year, **30% of people** over the age of 65 will fall.

What to Do if You Fall

- Don't panic. Assess the situation and determine if you are hurt.
- Slide or crawl along the floor to the nearest couch or chair and try to get up.
- If you can't get up, call for help.
- If you are alone, crawl slowly to the telephone and call 911 or relatives.



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PAGE 2

Medical Risk Factors

- Cardiac arrhythmias (irregular heartbeat) and blood pressure fluctuation
- Cancer that affects bones
- Depression, Alzheimer's disease and senility
- Arthritis, hip weakness or imbalance
- Neurologic conditions, strokes, Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis (MS)
- Urinary and bladder dysfunction
- Vision or hearing loss
- Side effects of medication

Tips to Reduce Medical Risk Factors

- Get an annual physical, eye examination, and an evaluation of cardiac and blood pressure problems
- Maintain a diet with adequate dietary calcium and vitamin D
- Participate in an exercise program for agility, strength, balance and coordination
- Keep an up-to-date list of all medications and provide it to all doctors with whom you consult
- Know the side effects of your medications
- Make sure all medications are clearly labeled and stored in a well-lit area according to instructions
- Take medications on schedule with a full glass of water, unless otherwise instructed

Personal Risk Factors

Personal risk factors account for approximately 75% of the risk of falls and are related to acquired disabilities, age-related changes, and current diseases.

Age: The rate of hip fractures increases after age 50, doubling every five to six years.

Activity: Lack of weight-bearing exercise leads to decreased bone strength.

Gender: Reduced levels of estrogen after menopause can result in osteoporosis. Women have two to three times as many hip fractures as men and a 20% chance of a hip fracture during their lifetime.

Habits: Smoking and/or excessive alcohol intake decreases bone strength. Caucasians and Asians with small, slender body structures are at risk; so are people who have a family history of fractures later in life.

Nutrition: Low calcium dietary intake, reduced calcium absorption, and inadequate vitamin D are factors in osteoporosis.

Falls in the elderly are very common and costly healthcare problems. However, 20 to 40% of falls can be prevented. Persons with three or more personal risk factors have almost a 100% chance of falling.



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PAGE 3

Osteoporosis and Fractures

Bone is a living tissue composed mainly of calcium and protein which provides strength. Bone is constantly reforming (remodeling) as calcium is added to your bones and absorbed by your body. Osteoporosis ("porous bone") develops when bone calcium is no longer replaced as quickly as it is removed, making the bone brittle. Each year, more than 1.5 million Americans have fractures related to osteoporosis.

Factors that contribute to osteoporosis are aging; physical inactivity; decreased levels of estrogen (especially associated with menopause); heredity; excessive cortisone or thyroid hormone; smoking; excessive alcohol intake; and inadequate dietary intake of calcium and vitamin D.

Make Your Home SAFE | Risk Factors in the Home

- 60% of falls occur at home, 30% occur in the community, and 10% occur in nursing homes or other institutions.
- About 25% of all falls are the result of hazards such as slippery or wet surfaces, poor lighting, inadequate footwear, and cluttered pathways in a home.
- Most fractures are a result of a fall in a home, usually related to everyday activities such as walking on stairs, going to the bathroom, or working in the kitchen.

Safety Precautions for Your Home

Kitchen

- Avoid climbing and reaching to high shelves
- Use a stable step stool with handrails
- Arrange storage at counter level
- Clean up spills as soon as they happen and don't wax floors

Bathroom

- Keep a night-light on in the bathroom
- Use bathroom rugs with nonskid backing
- Install handrails in the bathtub and toilet areas
- Place a rubber mat or nonskid strips on the bathtub/shower floor
- Leave the bathroom door unlocked, so it can be opened from both sides

Bedroom

- Remove throw rugs, extension cords, and other floor clutter
- Install a bedroom night-light
- Use a normal height bed. Before leaving your bed, sit on the edge for a time to make sure you are not dizzy

Living Area

- Arrange furniture to provide an open pathway between rooms
- Remove low tables, footrests, and other items from the pathway
- Keep electrical and telephone cords out of pathways

Footwear

- Wear low-heeled shoes with non-skid soles
- Tied shoes with a fairly snug fit are preferred, but keep the laces tied
- Avoid shoes with thick heavy soles



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