



ELDERLY FALLS

How to Reduce the Risk

Elderly falls impact the physical and psychological health of millions of older adults. According to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), falls are the leading cause of injury to people over 65. We can't know for certain how many seniors fall each year (since they don't always tell other people about their accidents). However, the CDC estimates the number to be about 30 million.

But many falls are preventable. With a few simple steps, you can reduce your odds of falling. In this article, you'll learn why seniors are at high risk for falls. You'll also discover tips for preventing falls and learn the steps to take if you do slip or tumble. As well, you'll learn about medical alert systems that help seniors get assistance in emergency situations.

Falls in the Elderly: Statistics You Should Know

Everyone falls sometimes. But falling can have dire consequences for the elderly. Fall statistics show the seriousness of the problem. According to the CDC:

- About three million seniors are treated for injuries from falls each year.
- Roughly 20 percent of falls cause head injuries, broken bones, or other serious damage.
- The vast majority of hip fractures are caused by accidental tumbling.

But when it comes to measuring the after effects of a senior citizen fall, statistics don't always tell the whole story. One reason is that many seniors don't tell anyone when they fall. (They don't want to 'appear old'). And the numbers don't always account for the long-term effects of a non-fatal fall, particularly on a senior's sense of pride and independence.

A fall can be a minor incident, especially for young people. But many falls are dangerous for elderly people because seniors often have existing health issues such as osteoporosis (which makes them more vulnerable to bone fractures) or heart problems (which can make recovering from an injury more difficult, especially if surgery is required).

The consequences of falls for the elderly often go beyond short-term injuries. Even seniors who don't have injurious falls can experience declines in their quality of life after falling.

Fear is part of the reason why. According to an article in the *International Journal of General Medicine*, up to 70 percent of seniors who have experienced a fall are worried about it happening again. And half of those seniors reduce their activity in response to their fears, which can lead to other physical and emotional health problems.

Why Seniors Fall

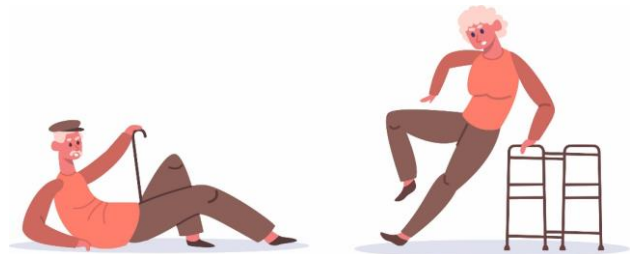
Many falls are "multifactorial." That means a combination of factors causes elderly people to fall. For example, consider an older woman who fell while going to the bathroom at night. All of these factors could be responsible:

Physical: She felt dizzy when she stood up because of her blood pressure medication.

Environmental: Her bedroom floor was cluttered because she can no longer bend over to pick things up.

Situational: Her room was very dark, and there wasn't a light in the bathroom, so she couldn't see the things on the floor.

Cognitive: She felt confused when she woke up because her husband is in the hospital and she's not used to sleeping alone.



Recovering From Elderly Falls

Even with careful fall and injury prevention, it's possible that you'll experience an accident at some point. Here are some steps to help you stay safe:

- Remain calm. Don't panic. You'll be OK.
 - Take a quick inventory. Before you start to move, assess your situation. Can you feel any pain? Are you dizzy at all? Are you near any kind of help? Look for the nearest secure object or piece of furniture that you can use to pull yourself up.
 - Roll onto one side. Bend your top leg and push yourself to a crawling position. Crawl carefully over to the furniture or object. Put your strongest leg in front, then place your hands on the furniture and pull yourself up. Carefully turn around so that you can sit down.
- If you think you might be injured, or if you feel dizzy:
- Activate your elderly-fall-alert device or other medical monitoring system if you have one. Don't worry about bothering anyone. Now is the time to use it!
 - Try to slide yourself toward the best place to be heard if you don't have a medical alert system. If a phone is in the room, try to move toward it.
 - Make noise if a phone isn't nearby. Tap the floor or cry out.

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AGEING CHANGES WITHIN THE RETINA



Dr Phiroze Patel

Consultant, Ophthalmic Surgeon

The central area of the retina - the macula - is the source of our central vision and of great importance to us. Age-related macular degeneration occurs mainly in this area, robbing us of our central vision. Hence, reading, writing and general viewing are severely compromised. Patients complain of not being able to see fine print and the words are twisted or blurred or merging into one another. At a distance, the centre of the object is fuzzy or appears like a black patch. They may not see a person's face but can see the outline of the body. With these symptoms, doctors are alerted in the elderly population to send them for further eye examination.

The eye doctors will ask for imaging studies to decipher the severity and nature of the disease process – eye angiography, macula scans (OCT) and occasionally ultrasound of the back of the eye.

Two broad types of disease occur - DRY AND WET TYPES OF MACULAR DEGENERATION. The DRY one is treated medically with oral specific vitamins as a daily dose regime. The WET one is treated with injections given inside the eye at regular intervals; occasionally laser treatment or surgery may be required too.

It is imperative that the patient and family members discuss all the details with their

doctor as these are long drawn-out diseases which will need constant attention. Unfortunately, the treatment DOES NOT cure the disease and may only stabilize it. The cost involved is very high but luckily it can be customised for the wallet of the patient as various drug companies have tried to help. For a long period of time there was no hope for patients with this condition but the last 15 years have been very encouraging for both doctor and patient as these ANTIVEGF INJECTIONS are seen to be helpful and further research will continue as we all are going to live longer and will face these situations.

WHY LEARNING SHOULD BE A PART OF AGEING



Ms Amruta Lovekar

Gerontologist & Project Coordinator, Graceful Living

Generally it is considered that there is a specific age for learning. Learning after a particular age is neither necessary nor is it encouraged much. But any form of learning, either a formal course or any other form of targeted or structured learning, needs to be a part of ageing.

Why? New research shows that the brain has the ability to function well; not just that but also excel in old age. The secret is to keep learning.

This was amply proved by a different and ambitious experiment done by Rachel Wu, a professor of Psychology at the University of California Riverside. She had seniors in their 60s, 70s and 80s immerse themselves in three somewhat rigorous courses simultaneously. They participated in 15 hours of class per week and also did homework assignments for three months. The results were impressive and standardised tests assessing their thinking and memory abilities showed that their

scores were similar to a middle-aged adult's scores, a significant improvement over their scores before the study began. Their brains were functioning like those of a person 30 years younger.

"Learning is the mechanism for development no matter how old you are", says Rachel Wu. The brain does not stop, it just acts differently when a person ages. Learning is the fuel to keep our brain in shape as much as our body.

“ Mind is not a dustbin to keep anger, hatred and jealousy. But it's a treasure box to keep love, happiness and sweet memories. ”

- Swami Vivekananda

Elderly falls... Continued from Page 1

Even if you feel fine immediately after a fall, symptoms can appear afterward. Tell someone right away that you've fallen. And watch for symptoms such as:

- Unusual sleepiness
- An increase in headaches
- Dizziness
- Pain in any part of your body
- Feelings of nausea
- Vision problems

Also, be sure to tell your doctor that you had a fall. Don't be embarrassed: Everyone falls at some point. Your doctor can help you make a plan for avoiding future falls. He or she may also want to order some blood tests and review your medications.

Having a fall can be an upsetting experience. Many seniors feel helpless and discouraged. But a fall can also be a reminder to stay on top of any health concerns, and it can act as a prompt for making positive changes.

Once you have recovered from a fall, continue with your activities as much as you can (incorporating any new fall-prevention techniques, of course). Remember that staying active can ultimately reduce your risk of falling. Many seniors reduce their activity after a fall because they are afraid it will happen again. But fear of falls, in older adults especially, can actually increase the risk. The result can be a vicious cycle. So if fear of falling is holding you back from any activities, talk to your doctor or mental health professional.

Elderly falls are not inevitable as we age. With a fall-prevention plan, you can protect yourself from the short- and long-term effects of falling. Talk to your doctor about ways to stay safe. And if you think a personal safety alert system is a good fit for you, research some options. Investing a little time right now in fall-proofing your life will benefit you significantly in the long run.

SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS OF GL

Physical

- This meeting was held on 19 May with the Kandivali Seniors Association. The subject for this support group meeting was 'Cardiomelon', a totally new concept which included physical exercises connected to cognitive simulation. It was conducted by Ms Amruta. Activities included were counting numbers, reciting tables, days of the week backward and so on. Exercises were demonstrated and participants performed these exercises with much excitement. Attendance: 35.
- This physical support group meeting on 8 June with Goregaon Seniors Association involved a quiz on our epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. It was to provide information and intellectual stimulation for seniors. Ms Amruta conducted this quiz program. Around 50 seniors were present. Seniors enthusiastically answered most of the questions and they were more than willing to learn more as they did seek answers to their dilemmas. They expressed that this was the very first time such a program was held in their association and they wanted more such programs in the future.

Online

- The music therapy session was held on 17 May. Mrs Munmun shared the major effects of music on the human mind. The release of endocrine enzymes reduces stress in the body and also strengthens the memory in seniors. She explained the first lines of some songs in English and asked people to identify them. The audience recalled many songs and sang some lines. Active and enthusiastic participation was the order of the day: 55 people attended.
- An online support group meeting was held on 14 June in collaboration with My Safe Place and the Rotary Club of Bombay Hills South. The subject was 'Yoga'. This meet was conducted by Ms Munmun Ghosh. She talked about Yoga and how it can and does reduce stress. She demonstrated some Yoga exercises, mentioned Yoga Sutras and also the eight-fold path by Patanjali. The elderly were grateful for this new learning. Attendance: 35 participants.
- An online meeting was conducted by Dr Prem on the occasion of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (15 June). Dr Prem defined the meaning of abuse and explained different kinds of abuse which take place. He urged people to report any kind of abuse they were victims of or had witnessed any such situation. Attendance - 33 seniors.

SPECIAL FASHION SHOW FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

Graceful Living organised a special fashion show for seniors on 4 June at Manav Seva Sangh, Sion; 15 seniors participated and they were more than willing to walk the ramp with a show stopper (our very own Mr Naval Pandole and his wife Jeroo) doing the honours at the end. This fashion show was unique in the sense that it included senior participants, some who could hardly walk. Each participant was asked two questions with the purpose of bringing out their inner beauty in the form of their experiences. The audience comprised nearly 200 people. All gave a very positive and encouraging response.



GRACEFUL LIVING
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GUEST LECTURE

On 27 May, GL presented a talk by Dr Vinay Deshmane, a breast surgical oncologist who spoke on cancer, its history and the gradual betterment of its cure in present times. He mentioned the relationship between age and cancer, cancer survivorship status, types of cancers, treatment, and the effects of such treatment. He specifically spoke on breast cancer. The session was very informative and many uncommon details were shared by him; 32 people attended the session.

WEBINAR

GL conducted a webinar on 28 May. Topic: 'Understanding and managing loneliness'. The panelists included were Ms Maherra Desai, Ms Naina Oak, Mrs Viju Chauhan and Ms Amruta Lovekar. Mr Manoj Gursahani conducted the session. According to them, reasons for loneliness include the death of a spouse or near and dear one. Ms Amruta defined the term 'loneliness'. She mentioned that Japan and the UK, both have a Loneliness Ministry. Tips and strategies were shared to enable the elderly reduce their aloneness. A tribute was paid to the late Mr Mahinder Singh, who used to be an active part of GL's webinars.

TESTIMONIALS: What people say about us...



Ms Rashida Chitalwala, Mazgaon Seniors Group. The music therapy program was very well conducted by Ms Munmun Ghosh of Suhana Safar for Graceful Living. This was held on 17 May. It was an extremely amazing program and the knowledge that was imparted was excellent too. Thanks to GL we are able to be part of such interesting programs.



Mr Nandkumar Bedarkar, Kurla Seniors Association. The program on 'music therapy' was well organised and well attended. Ms Munmun explained the role of music in our lives and how it has a calming and soothing effect.



Ms Namita Vaish, Dosti Acres Seniors Association. We enjoyed yesterday's fashion show very much. Had never heard of it done before. This made seniors feel so good and confident. By participating in it, my self confidence has gone up. I feel so much younger and energetic. Thanks for organizing such a wonderful program and conducting it with perfection. Many thanks to the GL team.



Ms Madhuri Dichwalkar Arya Chankya Nagar. Ms Amruta Lovekar called me and requested me to participate in the Fashion Show organized on 4 June at Banquet Hall, Manav Seva Sangh at 5.00 pm. I agreed and she directed me as to what had to be done. We entered a beautifully decorated hall, a stage for the ramp and the red carpet looked like a dream. There were 15 participants in all. I was honoured to be a part of this program. All participants were given gifts as memoirs at the end of the show.



AGEING WITH DIGNITY AND GRACE

Tulsi Trust was established by the Chanrai family in 1975 with an aim to fulfil basic needs of the poor and needy. At a deeper level, it's more than indulging in physical activities. Health care, skills development and education are top priorities. It envisages a fair world for all, working with partners to improve health care and opportunities for livelihood, and education. Add to this, the capacity to understand another's needs and do this with utmost integrity.

Graceful Living (GL) is an arm of Tulsi Trust which came out of a realization of a social need for elderly care. After three active years, GL is now a recognized organization for those in their twilight years and has created an awareness through its activities and talks for senior citizens. GL has a social presence viz. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

ACTIVITIES OF GRACEFUL LIVING

In Partnership...

- Intellectual companionship and special care programs – includes companionship, counselling and care-giving for Dementia, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's when required. These services are provided through our partners:

Echoing Healthy Ageing

Parkinson's Disease and Movement Disorder Society (PDMDS)

- Physiotherapy sessions which help the elderly to improve their mobility and become more independent:
Iconic Physio with Dr Pratha Mehta and Dr Rajshri Lad

- Training candidates in 'elder care' in order to have professionals for the same:

MMP Shah College – elder companionship course for Sociology students

Aaji Care – Geriatric counselling course for post-graduate Psychology students

- Activities for the elderly :

My Safe Place: mental wellness platform

Mrs Manasi Golwalkar: technology training

- Sensitization programs for school/college students to create an awareness of the needs and issues of the elderly.

Direct Intervention by GL...

- Support Group Meetings
- Webinars (Mr Manoj Gursahani)
- Guest Lectures by professionals/experts – mainly on Zoom
- Graceful Living Monthly Newsletter carrying important information for the elderly plus articles by known doctors and other professionals
- Online interviews with senior achievers called 'Sitare'
- Co-ordination by GL to create platforms for senior citizen organizations in the city.

HEARTY LAUGH...

A sweet grandmother telephoned St Joseph's Hospital. She timidly asked, "Is it possible to speak to someone who can tell me how a patient is doing?" The operator said, "I'll be glad to help, dear. What's the name and room number of the patient?"

The grandmother in her weak, tremulous voice said, Norma Findlay, Room 302." The operator replied, "Let me put you on hold while I check with the nurse's station for that room."

After a few minutes, the operator returned to the phone and said, "I have good news. Her nurse just told me that Norma is doing well. Her blood pressure is fine; her blood work just came back normal and her Physician, Dr Cohen, has scheduled her to be discharged tomorrow."

The grandmother said, "Thank you. That's wonderful. I was so worried. God bless you for the good news."

The operator replied, "You're more than welcome. Is Norma your daughter?"

The grandmother said, "No, I'm Norma Findlay in Room 302.

No one tells me shit."



VIEWPOINT

Life goes on and on. It's July, over two years since the Covid first started and we are still 'hooked' onto it. Not willingly of course! The fear still persists albeit not that much as today's Covid is like the passing wind. In a few days you are fine except that you dare venture out till your test kit proves you are negative. More for the sake of others.

I want to first highlight about the fashion show we had in June at Manav Seva Sangh, Sion, where the elderly walked the ramp displaying their guts, talent and confidence. There were 15 of them who sashayed the red carpet, each one gutsier than the other. With an audience of 200, it was a total success. The elderly no more feel/think they are seniors. They are as young as their hearts allow them to be.

The front page carries an article on 'Falls in the Elderly: Statistics You Should Know', which mentions why seniors are more prone to falling (inevitable) with steps on how to stay safe. This issue includes information on our regular support group meetings, off-line and online, testimonials by some participants appreciating GL, a webinar on 'Understanding and managing loneliness'. Our guest lecturer in June was none other than the renowned Dr Vinay Deshmane, a breast surgical oncologist who spoke on cancer and the relationship between age and cancer among other things. Our guest columnist, Dr Phiroze Patel has written on retinal changes in the eye.

And now an aside: Cricket does rule the world, especially India. Recently, it was India vs South Africa, the T-20 series, which ended in 2 wins for each. Although this proved a disappointment (no concrete results), the game was enjoyable. The cricket fever continues. So good luck to India for more wins this year. Cheers!

Asha Gurnani Vohra
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