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Look After Your Mum!

If you have parents, grandparents or friends who have a fall history this article is important for you.

Falls are common occurrence in the elderly and can have serious repercussions - broken bones, soft tissue damage and fear of falling - which lead to diminished health, mobility and quality of life. In 1998, accidental falls resulted in 45,069 hospitalisations and 1,014 deaths in Australia (Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, 2001).

Falls can also result in restriction of activity and fear of falling, reduced quality of life and independence. Even falls that do not result in physical injuries can result in the "post-fall syndrome" - a loss of confidence, hesitancy, tentativeness with resultant loss of mobility and independence. It has been found that after falling, 48% of older people report a fear of falling and 25% report curtailing activities. Falls are commonly cited as a contributing reason for an older person requiring admission to a nursing home. (F&BRG, Prince of Wales Medical Research Institute)

So what can we do to reduce the risk and severity of falls?

Osteoporosis does not usually directly cause falls but can magnify the injury due to weakening of the bone mass leading

to hip and leg fractures. Where osteoporosis is diagnosed professional advice from a physiotherapist or exercise therapist should be sought before exercising.

Strength, flexibility, and endurance are crucial to maintaining balance and preventing falls. Even if your basic perception of balance is good, you can still be at risk for falls if your muscles are weakened or stiff, or if you tire easily. Older adults have concerns about falling and often restrict their physical activities to prevent such a mishap. Ironically, lack of exercise only makes it more likely that a fall will occur.

Research indicates that the risk of falling in older adults can be reduced dramatically when specific exercises, activities, and interventions are performed. Wobble boards and unstable platforms have long been used by physiotherapists to assist patients in regaining strength and balance associated with ankle and hip injuries. There are many balance products such as Wobble Boards, Duradiscs, Foam Pads and Swiss Balls that are particularly effective tools to assist in ankle, knee and hip rehabilitation and balance training. Some such as the duraDisc (an air filled disc) have multiple uses and all are effective when stood or sat on, as they react with body movement.

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