

Another Exercise Benefit: You Won't Fall as Much

June 9 2010, By Glenda Fauntleroy

Remaining physically fit and sticking to a regular exercise routine could lower your risk of taking a tumble, finds a new research study.

About 19,000 people die each year in the United States from falls and about 8 million undergo treatment in emergency rooms. What's more, although falls are the leading cause of injuries among people age 65 and older, young people fall down just as much as [seniors](#), according to the study.

“We were not surprised that people 65 years and older were no more likely to report falling than younger people, given that younger people are more likely to engage in more risky activities, such as standing on ladders, running and playing sports,” said lead author Kristin Mertz, M.D., at the epidemiology department at the University of Pittsburgh.

Mertz and her colleagues wanted to learn what people are doing when they fall and whether fitness has a part in the likelihood of falling. Their findings appear online and in the July issue of the [American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#).

The researchers used data from participants in the Aerobics Center [Longitudinal Study](#) from 1970 to 1989 and who responded to questions about falls during a follow-up survey in 1990.

The survey asked whether the participants had fallen in the past 12 months and, if so, what they were doing when they fell. Were they, for

instance, walking, doing sports, exercising or getting out a tub? Participants answered questions about how many minutes each week they did aerobic [exercise](#) and they took a treadmill test as a measure of fitness.

Of the 10,615 participants between the ages of 20 and 87 years, 2,110 (or 20 percent) reported falling in the last year. Of those who fell, 15 percent fell while walking. Women were 2.8 times as likely as men to fall while walking, but fitness levels made a difference in men falling while it did not for women. The study found men with low fitness levels were 2.2 times more apt to fall while walking than were highly fit men.

“We were surprised to find that fitness and physical activity seem to have a stronger relationship with walking-related falls in men compared with women,” Mertz said.

The researchers concluded that individuals need about two hours of regular exercise a week to lower the risk of falling. Those who exercised less -- or not at all -- did not have the same protection.

Debbie Rose, co-director at the Fall Prevention Center of Excellence at California State University at Fullerton, agreed.

“Of all the fall prevention strategies that have been studied over the last two decades, well-designed exercise programs produce the best results, both in terms of lowering fall risk and fall incidence rates,” she said.

“Physical activities designed to improve aerobic endurance should be included in any activity program aimed at reducing fall risk.”

More information: Mertz KJ, et al. Falls among adults: the association of cardiorespiratory fitness and physical activity with walking-related falls. *Am J Prev Med* 39(1), 2010.

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