

# Extension Volunteer Program Helps Older Adults Ease Falling Fears

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(PhysOrg.com) -- For many older adults, a fear of falling can steadily decrease their physical activity, well-being and independence. At a minimum, their quality of life is jeopardized.

“[Falling](#) is a fact of life. As we age, it’s just what happens to us,” says Deb Eckart, a University of Maine Cooperative Extension educator in Washington County.

Eckart is the administrator for the Senior Companion Program, a statewide initiative of Cooperative Extension that enlists older adults as volunteers to provide in-home visits and assistance to homebound elders.

Through a program called “A Matter of Balance: Managing Concerns about Falls,” adults age 60 and older are taught how to make changes in their environments to reduce risk, exercise to increase strength and balance, and set goals for increasing activity. Participants learn how to survey their living accommodations, looking for ways to improve safety and reduce falling fears by installing handrails, nightlights, supports in the shower and tub, and a phone by the bed.

“We don’t have the balance we did when we were younger, yet we can do something about it,” says Eckart. “That’s why we’re teaching practical strategies to prevent falling and reduce the concern.”

Nationwide, more than a third of all adults 65 and older fall each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Among older adults, falls

are the leading cause of injury deaths, and the most common cause of nonfatal injuries and hospital admissions for trauma. In the past decade, the rates of fall-related deaths among older adults rose significantly.

“We know [older adults](#) experience the fear of falling and, as a result, many curtail their activities,” Eckart says. “Many who fall end up in long-term care facilities and never get home again. The goal is to make them feel more secure and comfortable being independent. It’s really phenomenal the impact the program can have. I’ve been pleasantly surprised at how much it helps people.”

Boston University and the New England Research Institutes, with funding from the National Institute on Aging, developed “A Matter of Balance.” Translation of the program using a lay-leader model was led by MaineHealth’s Partnership for Healthy Aging.

Provided by University of Maine

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