

Experts' advice for preventing a fall this winter

March 2 2015, by Jamie Brown

Falls are the leading cause of fatal injuries among older people but, even though the weather continues to be wet and icy, experts from the University of Manchester are showing that falls can be avoided.

Around a third of people over-65 and half of those over 80 will fall every year. In addition, the fear of falling can be a major barrier to independence.

As part of an EC funded project called FARSEEING, researchers at The University of Manchester are working together with partners across Europe to ensure that older people feel confident to remain active in their own home.

Dr Helen Hawley-Hague from the University said: "The mental and physical health benefits of being independent in the home are enormous, yet a fear of falling can prevent many people from carrying out activities.

"Living with a fear of falling can create a lot of worry to family members, friends and to us – resulting in a great deal of distress. A fear of falling can also lead to us dropping out of activities and staying at home more. This can result in a loss of confidence and feelings of boredom, frustration and loneliness."

To counteract this, the researchers are spreading information about simple activities that people can do and have created five films with

exercises that people can do easily at home. Watch them here.

They are also taking a technological approach by developing an app for smart phones which automatically sends a text, to a fall alarm service and / or a carer or relative, when someone has fallen.

This is currently being trialled in Norway in a group of [older people](#). One of them said: "It would make me feel safe to get a phone call from a person who asks what has happened. One who is not so far away." Others have said that having this app on their smartphone would give them confidence to go outdoors, when they would have otherwise stayed at home.

Dr Hawley-Hague is convinced that the high numbers of falls can be reduced by people taking precautions and speaking to their GP more frequently. "Keeping fit is even more important as you get older. Simple exercises and getting advice on healthy ageing can stop you falling and remove a lot of worry from your life."

Dr Hawley-Hague's advice to prevent falls:

1. Stay active and improve your strength and balance by attending a specific class run by your local authorities and health services
2. Did you know that you can be taught techniques for getting down to the floor and back up again? This will increase your confidence and is included in some strength and balance classes.
3. If you are concerned about your balance see your GP to get a referral to physiotherapy for a prescribed exercise plan
4. You can also see you GP or local authority to get a risk assessment done on your home
5. Keep moving around. Research suggests that you should do 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity each week, in bouts of 10 minutes. But check with your GP if you have any existing

conditions.

6. Good sturdy shoes will help you keep your balance and tucking in loose clothes prevents them catching on things.
7. Get your eyes tested regularly. This will help you keep your balance and spot trip hazards.
8. Some medications can increase your risk of falling. Check with your GP or discuss these issues with your pharmacist.
9. If you have fractured a limb recently and you have not had your bone health assessed, go to your GP to discuss your risk of Osteoporosis (fragile bones).
10. If you would like to know more about how you can be involved in developing technology which could help you to remain active or prevent falls, then get in touch with us (or your nearest university).

Provided by University of Manchester

Citation: Experts' advice for preventing a fall this winter (2015, March 2) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-03-experts-advice-fall-winter.html>

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