

Falls a growing and deadly threat for older Americans

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(HealthDay)—Falls are the leading cause of injury and death among

older people in the United States, and this health threat is likely to grow since 10,000 Americans now reach age 65 every day, a new federal report shows.

Every second of every day, an older American falls. As falls increase, so do [health care costs](#). In the report, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urged doctors to help prevent falls among this high-risk group.

"Older adult falls are increasing and, sadly, often herald the end of independence," CDC Director Dr. Tom Frieden said in an agency news release. "Health care providers can make fall prevention a routine part of care in their practice, and older adults can take steps to protect themselves."

Older Americans had 29 million falls in 2014, causing 7 million injuries. Falls cost Medicare an estimated \$31 billion a year, the CDC report revealed.

According to Dr. Robert Glatter, an emergency room physician at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City, "Falls among older persons and their attendant injuries—including head injuries, fractures and lacerations—are encountered on a daily basis by practicing emergency physicians."

Fall risk increases as aging people's muscles weaken, they become less active and they develop chronic health issues, researchers have found.

Injury rates from falls are seven times higher for seniors with medical issues than for those who are healthy, the CDC reported. Taking multiple medications adds to the danger.

Glatter added that vision problems, poorly fitting shoes and loose

carpeting can also lead to falls.

To reduce your risk, the CDC suggests these steps:

- Ask your doctor how to prevent falls and tell him or her if you have fallen recently.
- Be sure your doctor knows all the medications you take.
- Have your eyes checked at least once a year and be sure you use an up-to-date eyeglass prescription.
- Stay active and take part in programs to boost your strength and balance, such as tai chi. Ask your local Council on Aging for information about programs in your area.
- Remove all trip and fall hazards in your home.

The CDC urges doctors to make [fall prevention](#) part of routine office visits. The agency suggests these steps to doctors:

- Ask patients if they feel unsteady, have fallen within the past year or worry about falling.
- Recommend vitamin D supplements.
- Stop, switch or reduce doses of medications that could increase the risk of falls.

"It's vital to evaluate a patient's medication list for potential drug interactions that can make a patient drowsy, lower their blood pressure, and increase their risk of falls," Glatter said.

The report was published in the CDC's Sept. 23 *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

More information: The U.S. National Institutes of Health has more about [falls and older adults](#).

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