

Falls



Falls

Introduction

For my fact sheet topic I chose "Falls". I chose this because every other subject that seemed appealing to me was taken already and the topic "Falls" was the only word on the signup sheet that I actually recognized. Fortunately enough for me, the topic pertained to the elderly, which turns out to be one of the most frequently documented medical incidents.

When doing the research for Falls, I continuously thought of how when I was little, I was sleeping at my grandmother's house when I awoke to a very loud scream from outside my doorway, and being very young and scared I did not want to go investigate the noise. When the morning came and my parents awoke they found my grandmother on the floor in the bathroom and she had been the source of the scream that I had heard the night before. She had suffered a severe fall. My dad and uncles got my grandmother onto a towel and dragged her out of the small, cramped bathroom and into the front room. She was in quite a bit of pain, and needed to go to the hospital. After being examined, and getting a few x-rays, it was determined that she had fractured her hip and needed to get surgery. After that accident, my grandmother had difficulty walking around due to the pain. I could remember a few occasions when she needed to get out of her wheelchair, she would cry from the immense pain she was experiencing. She couldn't even walk down a single few inch step to get into her own garage.

The harsh reality is that every day a senior citizen will experience a fall that can, and most likely will, alter their way of life for the rest of their days. With the aging Baby Boomer population, the occurrence of falls in elderly populations will be on the rise. This topic needs to be examined closely by members of the medical field in order to equip the elder individuals as well as their family members in preventing falls and how to respond when a fall occurs.

Section 1: Background and Problem Statement

It would be no surprise to say that the average person knows an elderly person who has suffered a serious injury from a fall. In fact, falls are the most common injury in the elderly population. After an elderly person goes through the trauma of having a fall, their lives typically begin to change.

A very common side-effect from a fall is a new fear of falling. This fear may lead an elderly person to begin to limit their daily activities because they are scared of falling for a second time.

The new loss of independence may make them feel as though they are being isolated from the world, and growing apart from relationships. This can become a very depressing ordeal. Despite the high frequency of elderly falls, there is some good news. There are several preventive actions one can take to limit the likelihood of experiencing a serious fall, or lessen the extent of an injury if a fall does happen to occur.

- **Web site #1 Name:** Hebrew Senior Life
- **Web address:** <http://www.hebrewseniorlife.org/hsl.cfm?id=693>
- **Background Information:**

Healthy People 2010 did not have information on the subject of falls. As people age, their bones tend to become progressively weaker and weaker. This deterioration will ultimately lead to a serious fracture or broken bone if a fall is experienced by an aging individual. Once a fracture occurs it can be very difficult if not impossible for that person to get themselves back up again without the help of others. These falls can be the result of the environment, but also we cannot ignore other medical conditions that may be contributing to the situation. Falls become a major problem in someone's later years not only from the result of weakened physical traits, but also because coping with such a tragedy can be extremely difficult.

- **Web site #2 Name:** Emergency Care For You
- **Web address:**
<http://www.emergencycareforyou.org/YourHealth/ElderlySafety/Default.aspx?id=26010>
- **Background Information:**

A fall can be a significant event in the life of an older person, potentially marking the beginning of a serious decline in function or the symptom of a new or worsening medical condition. As people grow older, they become more fragile and susceptible to falls. Falls cause about 12 percent of deaths for people over age 65. The elderly are the fastest growing age group in the United States, according to ACEP, and studies show that the elderly use emergency medical services at twice the rate of other age groups. As the elderly population increases, so does the need to understand how to treat and prevent injuries from falls. Medical experts advise you or someone you are caring for to see a doctor after a fall. (Intro and Conclusion)

- **Web site #3 Name:** American Family Physician
- **Web address:** <http://www.aafp.org/afp/20000401/2173ph.html>
- **Background Information:**

The American Family Physician Web site has a great deal of information regarding what the elderly and their families can do to help prevent the incident of a fall. The site tells anyone interested the important questions one should ask their doctor when they are concerned that they may be in danger of suffering a fall. It also gives great advice on how to best modify one's home so that it is safer overall and greatly reduces the typical risk factors that can potentially harm an elderly person. The best part of the Web site, in my opinion, is the section dedicated to the families of an elderly person. This section is very useful because if an elderly person has to go through such extremes to help themselves, it only makes sense that their family has the resources to help and keep an eye on their older loved ones.

Section 2: Research

- **Web site #1 Name:** Penn State University
- **Web address:**
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.81.9958&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- **Summary of the research:**

Jeannine S. Schiller, Ellen A. Kramarow, and Achintya N. DeY from the Division of Health Interview Statistics and Office of Analysis and Epidemiology combined data from the 2001-2003 National Health Interview Surveys to better understand the frequency of falls experienced by the elderly in their own homes. Their results showed that adults over the age of 65 who had a nonfatal fall was 51 in a population of 1,000. They concluded that injuries from falls are very widespread in the elderly and have a direct correlation with the need for health care assistance and limits the overall activity of those affected. Also, the rate of fall injuries varies depending on demographic area and the health characteristics of those being studied.

- **Web site #2 Name:** JRRD
- **Web address:** <http://www.rehab.research.va.gov/jour/08/45/8/kloseck.html>
- **Summary of the research:**

This study explained the importance of cognitive ability when it comes to falls. Anyone with the ability to walk needs to be able to recognize obstacles in their environment, have a strong sense of balance, a sense of space, and good vision. With age, these abilities begin to deteriorate and it becomes harder for an aging individual to process all of this information accurately and orient their bodies in an appropriate manner to move from place to place. This means that someone going through this time in their life really needs to put a lot of thought and concentration into their actions when walking around. The most difficult part about this process is actually paying attention to the various factors associated with walking. Ultimately, because of the deterioration of cognitive abilities and neural processes, the brain is being required to interpret more information than it can handle and cannot accurately multitask.

- **Web site #3 Name:** Sacramento County Network of Care
- **Web address:**
<http://www.sacramento.networkofcare.org/aging/library/detail.cfm?id=1467&cat=180>
- **Summary of the research:**

In the mid 1990s colleagues from the Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta Georgia studied the effect of Tai Chi on the overall balance and strength of elderly people 70 and older. Tai Chi is a martial art that uses very specific and graceful slow movements. The scientists began a frailty reduction program for the elderly and it was sponsored by the National Institute on Aging. The study concluded, over a 15 week period, that Tai Chi does in fact improve balance and especially strength. Overall,

practicing Tai Chi over this period of time reduced the risk of falling by almost 50%. The real breakthrough of this study was that it is a highly cost-effective strategy to combat elderly falls. Once an elderly person learns how to do Tai Chi, they have that skill for the rest of their lives, and if they continue to practice it, they will have a higher quality of life for the rest of their life.

Section 3: Statistics

- **Web site #1 Name:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- **Web address:**
<http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Falls/adultfalls.html>
- **Summary of the statistics:**

The CDC gives us insight into who is at risk for experiencing a fall, and the severity of that fall. A study released by the CDC in 2005 showed several different statistics when it came to gender. For instance, men were more likely to die from a fall than women. The fall fatality rate in 2004 was 49% higher for men than for women (CDC 2005). In the same year, women were 67% more likely than men to have a nonfatal fall injury, but rates of fall-related fractures among older adults were more than twice as high for women as for men (Stevens et al. 2005).

- **Web site #2 Name:** Spotlight on Aging Research
- **Web address:**
<http://www.nia.nih.gov/NewsAndEvents/SOAR/v2n1/Highlights/fallprevention.htm>
- **Summary of the statistics:**

Researchers from the Yale School of Medicine performed an experiment to see if encouraging physicians in Hartford area to utilize proven fall-prevention techniques in their day to day practices would make a difference in their community. Through a partnership with the Connecticut Collaboration for Fall Prevention the two organizations provided these practices with training materials and advice on how to best teach these techniques to the elderly clientele. The two year study revealed that serious injuries suffered from falls decreased by 9 percent and the cost of medical expenses dropped 11 percent.

- **Web site #3 Name:** American Academy of Family Physicians
- **Web address:** <http://www.aafp.org/afp/20000401/2159.html>
- **Summary of statistics:**

The American Family Physician is a major national medical organization that represents almost 100,000 family physicians. Their mission is “to improve the health of patients, families and communities by serving the needs of members with professionalism and creativity” (About Us). Falls are the primary cause of injury-related visits to emergency rooms throughout the United States and the primary reason of unintentional deaths in people over the age of 65 years. The mortality rate for falls severely increases with age with falls accounting for 70 percent of accidental deaths in

persons 75 years of age and older. More than 90 percent of hip fractures occur as a result of falls, with most of these fractures occurring in persons over 70 years of age. One third of community-dwelling elderly persons and 60 percent of nursing home residents fall each year. Risk factors for falls in the elderly include increasing age, medication use, cognitive impairment and sensory deficits. (Introduction)

Section 4: Consumer Information

- **Web site #1 Name:** Rite Aid Pharmacy
- **Web address:** <http://giving-care.riteaid.com/giving-care/falls/advice-faq#Link>
- **Summary of the information:**

Rite Aid Pharmacy provides an “Advice and FAQ” on their Web site that addresses common concerns adult children’s experiences while caring for aging parents. Some of the most important advice included on the site are suggestions for safety measures to be taken around the home. Examples they provide include installing grab bars for maintaining balance, establishing clear and safe pathways, and offering reassurance to decrease the anxieties elderly people experience—which often contribute to falls. Certain exercises and activities are suggested, such as Tai Chi, dancing, and swimming, to help maintain balance. The advice given by Rite Aid addresses very real concerns that arise when caring for an elderly individual, and they offer valuable solutions to help ease the discomfort of the situation.

- **Web site #2 Name:** Old Age Solutions
- **Web address:** <http://www.oldagesolutions.org/Health/Falls.aspx>
- **Summary of the information:**

Oldagesolutions.org is a Web site for older adults in India and was created as a part of Technology Interventions for Elderly (TIE). They suggest first and foremost that an elderly person should talk to their doctors about the medications they are taking and see if they could be a contributor to a fall. Any elderly person should try and avoid the use of alcohol since it is a depressant and leads to poor coordination. If mobility is already a problem, the use of a walking aid such as a cane or walker will help to maintain balance. This site really emphasizes the importance of regular physical activity. Physical activity will strengthen muscles and keep joints, tendons, and ligaments flexible. If the individual has osteoporosis, using light weights during exercise can reduce the overall loss of bone.

- **Web site #3 Name:** Colorado State University
- **Web address:** <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/Pubs/consumer/10242.html>
- **Summary of the information:**

Colorado State University is an academic university that devotes part of its time to allowing easy access to health information across a broad spectrum. They give specific guidelines to follow for people looking to improve the living environment for an

elderly person. They suggest that for bathrooms, grab bars should be installed near the shower and toilet so that someone can brace themselves as they are stepping up or sitting down. Also, nonskid mats and rugs will prevent accidents. In kitchens it is advised to keep frequently used items within reach, or to keep a very sturdy step stool for reaching items high up on shelves or cabinets. It is advised to add nightlights throughout the home to guide someone towards the nearest light source.

Section 5: Solutions to the Problem (or Issue)

- **Web site #1 Name:** Falls in Older People
- **Web address:** http://ageing.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/35/suppl_2/ii37
- **Summary of the information:**

The UCLA School of Medicine and Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center is an academic organization that dedicates itself to clinical risk assessments, interventions, and other services to the elderly and their families. The organization gives several important suggestions about therapeutic and preventive approaches to reduce the risk of falls. One suggestion is to lie in a bed that has the head raised. This technique lessens the likelihood of a sudden loss of blood pressure in the head when waking and getting out of bed, especially if the individual sits on the edge of the bed for a few minutes prior to getting out of it. Another important factor is making sure the individual has proper visual and hearing aids at their disposal. Also, making sure the environment suitable for the elderly person is very important. Loose rugs, electrical cords, and dangerous furniture must be removed and lighting throughout the environment must be easily accessed and placed in the correct areas.

- **Web site #2 Name:** National Council On Aging
- **Web address:**
- **Summary of the information:**

The NCOA is dedicated to “Improving the Lives of Older Americans” through working with organizations throughout the nation to improve public policies by being the voice of older adults and for the people who care for these older adults. The biggest contribution of this organization is fundraising. Once funds are raised, they distribute the funds to the organizations that they have brought together so that multiple groups can do studies at the same time and make innovative breakthroughs that will benefit the elderly communities in our country.

- **Web site #3 Name:** Fall Prevention Center of Excellence
- **Web address:** <http://www.stopfalls.org/>
- **Summary of the information:**

The mission of the Fall Prevention Center of Excellence is to identify the best practices in fall prevention and to help communities offer all prevention programs to older people who are at risk of falling. The Fall Prevention Center of Excellence has created many helpful resources for those interested in fall prevention. These resources

include newsletters, fact sheets, and technical assistance briefs. Their site provides information for the elderly and their families, as well as for researchers and educators. The best part about this organization is that they are very dedicated to spreading their word to communities throughout California. That truly is the most effective way to make progress with such a health concern. The more they can educate communities, the more people will practice the techniques that have been proven to improve the lives of the elderly. If this can be accomplished, we will see a reduction in the number of falls, injuries from falls, and an increase in the quality of life for older people.

Conclusions:

Falls are a very serious and frequent health problem in America. I never really thought of why the elderly fall so much, I just assumed that in their old age their bodies became weaker. I couldn't have been vaguer in my assumptions. It is important to understand that the elderly are experiencing several problems at once, which all contribute to their tendency to fall and injure themselves. Factors such as medication, lack of exercise, deteriorating vision, hearing, and cognitive abilities and unsafe environments all contribute to falls. If there is anything to be gained out of this factsheet, it is that we need to spread awareness of the multiple tactics one can use to prevent a fall, and activities that can strengthen the body to prevent serious injuries from falls. Who would have thought that there is simple, cheap, and safe ways of taking care of oneself which can actually improve the life of an elderly citizen? If organizations keep promoting these valuable techniques our generation has the potential to be the healthiest generation of elderly our nation has ever seen.

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