



NORTHWEST AMBULANCE DISTRICT

**SERVING AUSTINGBURG TOWNSHIP, HARPERSFIELD TOWNSHIP,
GENEVA CITY AND TOWNSHIP AND TRUMBULL TOWNSHIP**

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From the Desk of Vincent T. Gildone

Preventing Falls in the Elderly Part I

Causes and Prevention

The causes of falls are known as risk factors. No single risk factor causes all falls, the greater the number of risk factors to which an individual is exposed; the greater the probability of a fall and the more likely the results of the fall will threaten the person's independence.

Many risk factors are preventable! Falls are not a normal part of aging and as such are preventable. The risk of falling increases with age and is greater for women than men. Two thirds of those who experience a fall will fall again within six months. A decrease in bone density contributes to falls and results in injuries. Regular exercise will result in better muscle tone, increases strength and less bone mass loss and increased flexibility.

One-third of all falls in the elderly involve environmental hazards in the home.

Osteoporosis is a condition where in bones become porous and less resistant to stress and more prone to fractures. In the medical field, it is debatable whether brittle bones break after the fall, or break when stressed and causes the fall. Weight bearing exercises, a good calcium rich diet, sufficient vitamin D and sunlight will help. Failure to exercise regularly results in poor muscle tone, decreased strength and loss of bone mass and flexibility. All contribute to falls and the severity of the injury due to falls. Exercise done regularly (every day for 15 minutes) will increase muscle and bone strength and improve balance and flexibility. Walking or swimming are two good examples. Undertake all daily activities in a safe manner. Take time to get your balance when rising from your chair or bed. Always wear proper fitting, supportive shoe with low heels and rubber soles.

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Medications that reduce mental alertness, worsening balance and gait, may also cause drops in blood pressure while standing all add to the causes of falls. Examples of these medications include; sedatives, antidepressants and anti-psychotic drugs to name a few. If you are taking multiple medications you are at a greater risk of falling.

Know your medications, side effects, make an effort to use the lowest effective dosage by talking to your doctor and pharmacist. If you need walking aids such as a cane while taking medication, use one. Do not take outdated medication. Ask your physician to review all your medications at least 1 time per year. Limit intake of alcohol, it may interact with medication. Alcohol also has its own fall issues.

At least one-third of all falls in the elderly involve environmental hazards in the home. Tripping, poor lighting, loose rugs, lack of grab bars or poorly located and mounted grab bars and unsteady furniture are examples of common trouble makers in the home.

....more to come next issue.

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