



UNIVERSITY OF
FLORIDA

IFAS EXTENSION

Fall Prevention¹

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Aging in the 21st Century

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by the year 2050 the nation's elderly population will more than double to 80 million, and the more frail, over-85 population will quadruple to 18 million.

Currently, Florida ranks first in the United States in the percent of the population who is full-time and seasonal residents over the age of 65. Older Floridians, their families and communities face a myriad of issues related to aging.

Aging in the 21st Century is an eight-topic program that addresses issues such as:

- health and medical care
- family relationships
- economic concerns
- caregiving
- home modifications
- retirement
- nutrition and diet

Institute on Aging core faculty from the Colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Health Professions, and Liberal Arts and Sciences joined Extension faculty from IFAS as educators for this series.

1. This document is FCS2214 FY629, one of a series of publications from the distance education in-service "Aging in the 21st Century," coordinated by Carolyn Wilken, PhD, MPH, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, UF/IFAS. First published: September 2003. Reviewed by Candice King, formerly coordinator of Research Programs, Institute on Aging. University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

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WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

- **FALL PREVENTION:** why it is important
- **RISK FACTORS:** the major risk factors of falls
- **INTERVENTION STRATEGIES:** how to prevent falls among older adults
- **COMMUNITY RESOURCES:** what kind of help is available in your community
- **FLIPS:** what it is and how to learn more about it

WHY FALL PREVENTION IS IMPORTANT

Fall prevention is essential for a variety of reasons. Here are some important facts:

- One third of seniors 65 years and older fall each year.
- In 1999, approximately 21,000 seniors in Florida were hospitalized due to hip fractures.
- One third of nursing home admissions are due to falls.

Falls are not only dangerous for older adults; they can also be very costly. As the population continues to become older, the costs of falls increases. In 2000 the cost of medical care related to falls was approximately \$20.2 billion. In 2002 it is expected that this will increase to \$32.4 billion.

When someone falls there are other costs as well. People who fall may face *long-term disability, lower productivity and loss of independence.*

RISK FACTORS: WHY DO OLDER ADULTS FALL MORE THAN OTHERS

Older adults tend to fall more often than other people. There are several reasons why:

- Physical, behavioral and mental changes associated with aging,
- Lifestyle and daily behaviors,
- Environmental factors, and
- Community policy.

In this section we will discuss each of these risk factors. Later, we will take a look at how older adults can reduce the risk of falling.

PHYSICAL CHANGES

Physical changes associated with aging are known to increase the risk of falling. These risks are mostly related to a person's medical condition. People over the age of 65 experience similar physical changes and medical conditions.

These changes and medical conditions become more frequent and numerous with each passing year. Having one of the following conditions increases the risk of falling. Having more than one of these conditions increases the risk even more:

- Diabetes
- Arthritis
- Osteoporosis
- Stroke

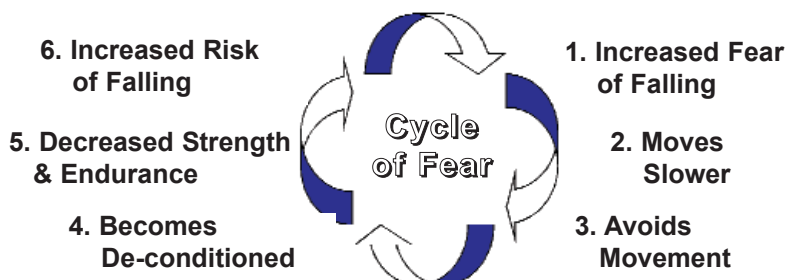
- Incontinence
- Musculoskeletal stiffness
- Weak muscles
- Problems with sensory perception: hearing, vision, feeling
- Balance and gait impairment
- Cognitive/mental problems: memory disorder, inattention, dementia, depression.

LIFESTYLE AND DAILY BEHAVIORS

Regular day-to-day activities may also be risk factors when considering falls. Here is a list of lifestyle and daily behaviors that you should avoid in order to prevent falls:

- **Lack of exercise:** Take part in some kind of physical activity to keep muscles and bones strong.
- **Improper footwear:** Wear shoes that give you support. Ladies, avoid heels.
- **Alcohol use:** Alcohol impairs your sense of balance and increases the risk of falling.
- **Poor nutrition and hydration:** Eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of water.
- **Fear of falling:** The diagram below shows how fear of falling can actually increase the risk of falls.

A Dangerous Cycle



RISK FACTORS

ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS

Environmental risks are common in your home and neighborhood. These risks include:

- **Clutter:** Keep clutter in the home to a minimum.
- **Poor lighting:** Replace the lighting in your home with brighter lights. Place a nightlight in the bathroom and dark hallways.
- **Lack of supports:** Install handrails in the bathroom and at the steps into your home.
- **Out of reach items:** Keep objects in your home at a level you can easily and safely reach.
- **Obstacles in walkway:** Be alert to objects in your path that may cause you to trip.
- **Small pets:** Be aware of pets that get underfoot and may cause you to fall.

Did you Know?

60% of people fall in the home

30% fall in public areas

10% fall in healthcare facilities

COMMUNITY POLICIES

Appropriate community policies can protect older adults from falling. That is why it is important to be sure that community officials:

- Comply with safe public access laws,
- Repair cracked sidewalks in front of buildings and homes,
- Ensure hand rails and ramps are installed,
- Set traffic lights to provide ample time for crossing busy streets, and
- Develop a referral system and resource network.

INTERVENTION & PREVENTION

Age-Related Changes

- **Assess and manage chronic conditions such as vision & hearing**
- **Follow a healthy diet**
- **Do an osteoporosis screening**
- **Reduce medication intake if possible**
- **Visit a physical therapist for balance & gait training if necessary**
- **Learn to stand and pause before you step**

Lifestyle & Daily Behaviors

- **Exercise mental activity by playing chess or bridge**
- **Take part in an exercise and strength building program**
- **Engage in confidence training to reduce fear of falling**
- **Stay active**
- **Learn your limits**
- **Make use of assistive devices such as walkers, canes and reachers**

Environment

- **Keep items at home within easy reach**
- **Add correctly positioned grab bars to toilets and bathtubs**
- **Place nightlights in hallways, bedrooms and bathrooms**
- **Have your bed and nightstand at a proper height**
- **Remove clutter, cords and rugs from pathways**

Community

If you need help, there are a number of community resources available to you. Contact:

- **Physical therapists**
- **Occupational therapists**
- **Dieticians**
- **Social workers**
- **Home health nurses**
- **Community programs**
- **Cooperative Extension Offices**

FLIPS FLORIDA INJURY PREVENTION PROGRAMS FOR SENIORS

FLORIDA INJURY PREVENTION PROGRAM FOR SENIORS (FLIPS) IS AN EDUCATION AND AWARENESS INITIATIVE THAT FOCUSES ON PREVENTING INJURIES FROM FALLS, FIRES AND POISONINGS AMONG OLDER ADULTS.

The program is a collaborative effort between state and local agencies. The FLIPS Steering Group includes the Departments of Health, Elder Affairs and the Office of the State Fire Marshal of the Department of Insurance. Other partners include the Florida Poison Information Centers, the University of Florida, the University of South Florida, and the Department of Children and Families.

Local emergency medical services agencies, local fire departments, county public health departments, hospitals, Area Agencies on Aging and home health care groups all participate in statewide FLIPS projects.

Although the primary focus of FLIPS is falls prevention, other FLIPS projects include:

- **FIRE SAFETY:** Providing Florida's poorest seniors with smoke detectors, in conjunction with the State Fire Marshal's Office.
- **POISON AND MEDICATION SAFETY,** in conjunction with the Florida Poison Information Centers.
- A statewide **FALLS PREVENTION CONFERENCE**, through the Department of Health.
- **MINI-WORKSHOPS** throughout the state.
- Providing **EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL**, such as brochures and pamphlets, to agencies who serve Florida seniors.
- Serves as a **SPEAKER'S BUREAU** for content experts to provide speakers for local senior groups as well as state workshops and conferences.
- **FLIPS/EMS PACKET PROJECT:** This is a new project with 10 pilot sites in EMS agencies around the state. Each EMS agency will provide injury prevention information to seniors in their response area.
- A cooperative project among the Departments of Health and Elder Affairs, the Office of the State Fire Marshal and Lee Memorial Health Systems to develop an **EXERCISE TAPE** for seniors.

For more information on the FLIPS program contact Janet Lehman, FLIPS coordinator in DOEA at (850) 487-1911 or lehmanji@elderaffairs.org

PUBLICATIONS IN THIS SERIES:

- ***The Future of Aging is Florida***
Jeffrey Dwyer, PhD
- ***Safe Return***
Meredeth Rowe, PhD
- ***Financial Issues***
Jo Turner, PhD, CFP
- ***Elder Nutrition***
Linda Bobroff, PhD, RD, LD/N
- ***Developing Educational Programs for Older Adults***
Carolyn Wilken, PhD, MPH
- ***Family Relationships in an Aging Society***
Terry Mills, PhD
- ***Adapting the Home***
Pat Dasler, MA, OTR/L
- ***Fall Prevention***
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