

Falls prevention



What is fall prevention?

At least one-third of community-living Australians aged 65 years and over fall every year, with even higher rates for people in aged-care facilities and hospitals. Falls are also the leading cause of injury-related death and hospitalisation in these people. An older person is over three times more likely to be admitted to a nursing home after a fall than before, and over ten times more likely after a fall that caused an injury.

Falls can result in permanent disability, restriction of activity, loss of confidence and fear of falling, all of which reduce quality of life and independence. The economic cost of fall-related injuries is estimated at more than double that of injuries in car accidents.

How does exercise help prevent falls?

There is now good evidence that exercise can prevent falls in older people by decreasing a number of key risk factors. For example, exercise can improve muscular strength, balance, balance confidence and walking speed, as well as psychological factors such as mental ability and mood.

Things to remember

- Professional supervision may be required for some challenging exercises.
- The focus of exercises should be on balance related tasks.
- Walking or strength training programs as single interventions do not appear to prevent falls.
- Programs of at least 2 hours of exercise per week for 6 months or more are more effective in preventing falls than lower dose programs.
- There is strong evidence which supports exercise as a single intervention to prevent falls in community settings.

What type of exercise is best for fall prevention?

Exercise Right recommends engaging in exercise programs that include balance training. In order to be effective, interventions must be performed regularly, be of sufficient duration (at least 2 hours per week) and be ongoing. These factors increase the chance of exercise successfully preventing falls.

- **Balance exercises** involve controlled body movements while standing with the feet close together (or standing on one leg), with as little arm support as possible. The exercises should be safe, but should challenge balance and develop strength.
- **Tai chi or hydrotherapy** can be effective forms of exercise for fall prevention in healthy older people and can be accessed in the community.