



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Adult Falls

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

[Matthew Reynolds] Welcome to A Cup of Health with CDC, a weekly broadcast of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Matthew Reynolds.

Unintentional falls are a common cause of injury and even death in older adults. Falls are the most common cause of hip fractures. A broken hip can lead to long hospitalizations, a painful recovery period, and difficulty walking. In 2003, nearly fourteen thousand seniors died and over one and a half million were treated in emergency rooms after falling. A group of CDC researchers used data from death certificates and from hospital emergency rooms around the country to study national trends in fall-related deaths and injuries.

Here to speak about their recent report describing these trends is Dr. Judy Stevens of the CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Welcome to the program, Dr Stevens.

[Dr. Stevens] Thank you, Matthew.

[Matthew Reynolds] Dr. Stevens, how big a problem is falling for older adults?

[Dr. Stevens] Well, it's a huge problem. I think almost everyone I speak to knows somebody – a parent, a relative, a friend – who has fallen. We know about a third of all older adults, that's people 65 and older, fall every year. Falls also are the leading cause of death from injuries for people over 65. Every hour, an older adult dies from a fall-related injury.

[Matthew Reynolds] Those are staggering statistics. What are the long-term health effects of falls among older adults?

[Dr. Stevens] Falls cause a range of injuries; about 20% cause serious injury, like a fracture or head injury, and these can result in serious disability, which can make it hard for seniors to get around and to live independently in their own homes. It can also increase their risk of early death. Falls cause between 400,000 and 500,000 fractures each year. Even for seniors who haven't fallen, many develop a fear of falling. This can lead to them limit their activities, thinking that this will make them safer, but actually it increases their risk of falling and at the same time, also reduces their quality of life.

[Matthew Reynolds] Do more seniors fall now than in the past?

[Dr. Stevens] Well, the number of seniors is growing, so of course the absolute number of falls is also increasing, but the most important way to look at this is to look at the rate – that’s the number who fall out of every 100,000 older adults. What we found in our study was that from 1993 to 2003, the rate of fatal falls increased 55%. This is a significant increase.

[Matthew Reynolds] Do falls affect men and women equally?

[Dr. Stevens] No. Men and women differ in the way they respond to falls. Men are more likely to die from an injury from a fall, and women are more likely to have a non-fatal injury, such as a fracture. Hip fractures are especially serious and much more likely to happen to women than to men.

[Matthew Reynolds] Isn’t falling just something that happens to you when you get older?

[Dr. Stevens] No, falls are not an inevitable part of aging. Research has clearly shown that there are steps that seniors can take to keep from falling.

[Matthew Reynolds] So how can falls be prevented?

[Dr. Stevens] We know a number of things that people can do to help prevent falls. The first is regular exercise, especially exercise that helps improve balance and leg strength. One example would be Tai Chi, as an exercise. The second is having medicines that they take reviewed by a doctor or pharmacist to help reduce any side effects or interactions that can lead to falling, things like dizziness. The third would be having your vision checked. We know vision is very important for maintaining balance and reducing falls. And then the last would be, of course, reducing potential fall hazards in the home, such as clutter and tripping hazards.

[Matthew Reynolds] What materials is CDC providing to help older adults reduce their risk of falling?

[Dr. Stevens] The Injury Center at CDC has two brochures and some posters to help older adults and their families and caregivers to prevent falls and injuries from falls. The first brochure is *What You Can Do to Prevent Falls*, and that discusses the four key messages that I mentioned earlier: exercising, reviewing medicines, having your vision checked, and reducing home hazards. The second is *Check for Safety: The Home Prevention Checklist*. This walks you through your home and helps identify potential fall hazards and gives suggestions for correcting them. These were recently designed and updated by the Injury Center, in partnership with the CDC Foundation and the Met Life Foundation. We also have four posters that highlight the key messages. All of these materials are available in English, Spanish, and Chinese, and they’re all free. They can be ordered at www.cdc.gov/injury.

[Matthew Reynolds] Well thanks, Dr. Stevens, for taking the time to talk with us.

[Dr. Stevens] Thank you.

[Matthew Reynolds] That's it for this week's show. Don't forget to join us next week. Until then, be well. This is Matthew Reynolds for A Cup of Health with CDC.

[Announcer] To access the most accurate and relevant health information that affects you, your family and your community, please visit www.cdc.gov.