



Lower risk of falling with good nutrition

About 30 percent of people over age 65 experience at least one fall per year. One out of 20 of those falls results in a debilitating bone fracture. The most common causes of falling are related

to:
» Loss of strength and balance
» Side effects of medication
» Poor nutrition
» Vision problems
» Unsafe living environment
» Foot problems

Some of these causes are difficult to avoid, but many can be prevented or at least minimized. Poor nutrition might seem a minor cause, but it is more important than most people realize.

Question: How does poor nutrition contribute?

Answer: Poor general nutrition causes a loss of overall strength and energy. Some people experience decreased appetite with age and need to make extra effort to consume enough food to meet their calorie and nutrient needs.

A low level of activity reduces

calorie needs, but protein requirements remain the same or may even increase. To keep muscles strong, it is important to maintain adequate protein intake along with regular physical activity.

Q: Are other specific nutrients related to a risk of falling?

A: Vitamin D directly benefits bones and it also appears to play a role in maintaining strength and function of the lower body. A three-year study of women and men over 65 tested the use of a daily supplement with 700 IU of vitamin D and found that supplementation reduced the odds of falling by 46 percent in the more physically active women and by 65 percent in the less-active women. Other studies have found vitamin D status to be associated with better lower-body function in both women and men.

Problems with vertigo or dizziness can create a serious risk for falling. Often, vertigo is re-

lated to problems with inner ear function or side effects from drugs and requires a careful medical evaluation. However, iron deficiency (even without anemia) can cause dizziness, and iron status should be carefully evaluated if other causes of dizziness are not established.

Vitamin B-12 deficiency, common with aging, damages nerves that may be involved in balance. For many, a simple and inexpensive B-12 supplement can lower this risk.

Dehydration can lead to problems with balance and increase the chance of a fall. Therefore, drinking enough fluids may also help to avoid falls. Also, overly low blood pressure can impair both brain function and balance. Caffeine sources like coffee and tea may help some people avoid the blood-pressure drops that commonly occur following meals.

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