

# Fear of Falling and Older Adults:

## Finding Balance

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**Falls are a major public health concern for older adults.** Annually, 1 out of every 3 Americans aged 65+ experiences a fall. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, falls are the leading cause of hospitalization for trauma and the leading cause of injury death for aging adults. Falls are also associated with numerous physical and psychological health conditions, decreased quality of life, and high health care costs.

**Fear of Falling (FOF)** is defined as an exaggerated concern about falling or the belief that one cannot prevent a fall. Intense anxiety about falling can be experienced by older adults who have fallen, as well as those who have not. Although studies have shown that women are at an elevated risk, fear of falling affects both men and women. Awareness of fall statistics may instill a fear in individuals, leading to behavior changes that limit functional abilities. As a result, individuals may experience social isolation and decreased emotional well-being.

**Excessive worry about falls is directly associated with a decrease in quality of life for older adults. It is therefore crucial that aging individuals try to strike a balance: staying actively engaged with their normal routines as much as possible while implementing reasonable, proactive safety measures to prevent falls.**

### Risk factors for FOF include:

- Cognitive impairment
- Depression & anxiety
- Problems with walking and balance
- A previous fall
- Limited social support
- Rural residence
- Living alone
- Social isolation

### Strategies to Reduce FOF:

- Recognize and acknowledge fears and anxiety about falling
- Learn to ask for help
- Talk to your family, friends, and healthcare providers; discuss behavioral risks
- Improve the safety of your environment
- Increase physical activity and exercise
- Strengthen lower body muscles to improve balance and mobility
- Improve activities of daily living (ADL) functioning

### Internet Resources:

For more information on risks of falling and fall prevention, please see other fact sheets from this series. You can also visit the following websites - type the term "fall" into the search box at each site to access information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
<http://www.cdc.gov>

National Institutes of Health  
<http://www.nihseniorhealth.gov>

National Council on Aging  
<http://www.ncoa.org>

National Institute on Aging  
<http://www.nia.nih.gov>