

## Why Fall Prevention Is So Important in Florida

Every day for the next 20 years, roughly 10,000 Americans will celebrate their 65th birthdays. By 2030, when the last Baby Boomer turns 65, the demographic landscape of our nation will have changed significantly. 72 million people will be an older adult, or one in every five Americans.

One of the preventable pitfalls of growing old is that as many as a third of older adults will experience at least one fall over the course of a year. This means that 24 million Americans will experience at least one fall in 2017.

With its world-famous beaches and year-round temperate climate, Florida is a wonderful place for older people to live. However, balance problems and risk of injuries relating to falls can interfere with plans for a happy retirement. Physical therapy services are ideally suited for identifying and treating issues that affect balance and create a higher risk for falls.

In Florida, almost 20% of our residents are at least 65 years old, which means that nearly 3.2 million older adult Floridians will fall at least once in 2017. In 2014, 2,445 older Floridians died as a result of a fall and an additional 50,730 were hospitalized, costing over \$46,000 per hospitalization.

Coinciding with the beginning of our Fall season, the Florida Physical Therapy Association (FPTA) annually promotes Fall Prevention Week in Florida for the benefit of our older residents and their families by explaining the benefits of utilization of physical therapists and their related services. Advancing age alone increases fall risk, specifically for those between the ages of 75 and 84. Increasingly low levels of physical activity can be countered when physical therapists help an older adult create a physical activity plan that considers their unique needs. Plans are tailored specifically for patients with the goal of improving walking, balance, leg weakness, and fear of falling while preventing decline in muscle strength, power, and cardiovascular fitness.

A physical therapist can also facilitate communication with other members of an older adult's health care team regarding nutritional and health screening needs. Older Floridians with chronic health conditions such as arthritis, high blood pressure or diabetes are at a high risk of falls. The taking of multiple or new medications may lead to dizziness or fatigue. Common age-related incontinence might create a rush to the bathroom and opportunity for a fall. The eyes and ears are key assets to helping older Floridians stay on their feet, so vision and hearing checks are important, as is the wearing of proper footwear. Household environmental obstacles as simple as throw rugs and other factors ranging from poor lighting, clutter and furniture placement to a lack of grab bars can be easily identified and rectified.

Unfortunately, many older adults who are hospitalized do not recover previous activity levels and are often re-hospitalized within 30 days of discharge from an acute facility or an emergency department. Therefore physical therapists and physical therapist assistants are so important. As movement experts, physical therapists have a skill set that, when utilized, will prevent falls, visits to the emergency department and hospitalizations. Unfortunately, physical therapy services are often not utilized until an injury occurs. In this way, the profession is reactive to the needs of the community. Although physical therapists and physical therapist assistants are essential members of rehabilitation care teams, these clinicians are also injury and functional-decline PREVENTION experts.

Fall screening, assessment, intervention and prevention are part of the important professional services provided by physical therapists and physical therapist assistants. An older adult should not wait for a fall episode to seek the skilled services of a physical therapist to address their fall risk.

The Physical Therapists and Physical Therapist Assistants at Florida West Coast Physical Therapy are specially trained in dealing with all aspects of fall prevention and recovery. Please call any of our offices for further information or to schedule an evaluation.