

# Common Mental and Physical Health Problems of Elderly: Care hints for Caregivers



## **FALLS AND INSTABILITIES**



Issued in the interest and for the care of the elderly by

## **THE DEPARTMENT OF GERIATRIC MENTAL HEALTH**

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## Falls and Instabilities :

### Definition:

Falls are a major cause of both disability and death in senior citizens. They occur frequently. More than one third of people over 65 years have at least one fall each year. After a fall, elderly patients voluntarily and commonly restrict their activity because they fear another fall.

### Symptoms:

Injuries sustained in a fall may range from trivial bruises to life threatening traumas. Head injuries and fractures of long bones add to the list of serious outcomes. Symptoms of fall will depend upon site of injury. There may be a delay in the onset of the effects of head injury.

### Causes of falls:

Several medical problems may predispose a patient to suffer a fall. Visual changes may decrease visual acuity, particularly at night or in the dark, increase the chances of a fall. Neurological problems that cause weakness or affect stability and balance also set the stage for a fall. More serious medical problems, such as stroke, seizures, bleeding with associated anemia, and heart disease, particularly abnormalities in heart rate and rhythm, can lead to falls.

The caregivers need to know that all falls merit some degree of evaluation. If there has been a health risk, your physician should be involved in the evaluation and any needed treatment. If health and limbs remain intact, there is still a concern about why the fall occurred and how to prevent future falls. Your physician can help evaluate health related causes, but you must evaluate environmental causes in the home.

The environment is responsible for more than one third of all falls. Improper lighting, inadequate handholds,

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unstable furniture, loose rugs and uneven floors all pose risks. Tremors or shaking moments may have many causes. Tremor is the most visible sign of the Parkinson's disease. Parkinson's disease sometimes called 'paralysis agitans' is a problem caused by changes in a portion of the brain. Parkinson's disease affects older people, most cases occurring after 50 years of age. Patients with Parkinson's disease also experience muscular rigidity, slowness of movement and disturbed posture and features like retropulsion, propulsion and instability after sudden turn. These all can be reasons for falls.

### **Treatment of falls and instabilities:**

The treatment is mainly conservative and educative. All elderly people with physical problems related to posture, movement, and abnormal motor movements of the body need to be evaluated for their treatment. All these conditions make a person prone for falls. The care givers in particular should be educated to provide available physical support systems such as hand support, stick, walking stand, wheel chairs etc. Environmental modification like proper lightening, adequate hand holds, suitable furniture, well arranged rugs and even floors in the house make the movements safe. Just as it is possible to "child proof" a house for a toddler, it is possible to make a house "fall proof" for the elderly. The shortest route from one place in the house to another may not be the safest. Always take the safest route.

For further information & treatment contact:

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