



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Mary Bassett, M.D., M.P.H.
Commissioner

UPDATE # 34: Update for [Health Advisory #22](#) regarding falls among older adults.

- **Assess all adults aged 65 years and older for fall risk annually.**
- **Use the CDC STEADI Tool Kit to assess and reduce falls risks among older adults.**

Distribute to all clinical staff in the Department of Geriatrics, Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, Pharmacy, Primary Care, Physical Therapy, Rehabilitative Medicine, Orthopedics.

September 30, 2014

Dear Colleagues,

Falls are the leading cause of injury-related hospitalization and death in adults aged 65 years and older. Each year in New York City, falls among older adults cause approximately 29,000 emergency department visits, 17,000 hospitalizations and 300 deaths. Among those hospitalized for a fall, 13% have traumatic brain injuries, 48% have bone fractures and 78% require further services upon discharge including skilled nursing and home health care.

Health care providers can reduce the risk of falls by assessing all adults aged 65 and older annually for fall risk factors. Ask every older adult patient if they have fallen in the past year or if they have trouble with balance or walking. If a patient has fallen, get details of the circumstances surrounding each fall.

For patients who have fallen or have trouble with balance or walking, assess:

- Gait and balance with the [Timed Up and Go test](#)
- Muscle strength with the [30 Second Chair Stand test](#)
- [Orthostatic blood pressure](#)
- Visual acuity

Physical activity has been demonstrated to reduce fall risk in older adults.¹ Health care providers should recommend that all older adult patients engage in 150 minutes of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity weekly. Additionally, remember that all women aged 65 and above should be screened for osteoporosis.

For older adults at increased risk for falls:

- Incorporate muscle strengthening and balance training into physical activity regimens
- Recommend vitamin D supplementation, 800 IU daily.
- Review all prescription and non-prescription medications, vitamins and supplements. If possible, eliminate or replace [medications that increase fall risk](#).
- Educate patients on eliminating [fall hazards in the home](#).

- Refer as appropriate to physical or occupational therapy, optometry or ophthalmology and home health assessment and services.

For an easy-to-use comprehensive guide to fall risk assessment and prevention planning, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths & Injuries \(STEADI\) algorithm](#). The [STEADI website](#) contains tools to build falls risk assessment into your practice including instructional videos demonstrating validated tests for gait, balance and strength assessment and patient education materials.

Providers can be reimbursed for fall screening and prevention planning conducted during the [Medicare Annual Wellness Visit](#). Part IV Maintenance of Certification credits for STEADI falls prevention quality improvement programs are now available for New York practitioners through the [American Board of Internal Medicine](#) and the [American Board of Family Medicine](#).

Additional information on best practices and tools for fall prevention can be found online.

- NYC Regional Electronic Adoption Center for Health's webinar, [Falls Prevention: Burden of Injury, Tools & Best Practices](#)
- Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's City Health Information, [Preventing Falls in Older Adults in the Community](#).
- Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Falls Prevention website www.nyc.gov/health/preventfalls.
- [Department for the Aging](#)'s fitness programs, walking clubs and other health promotion resources for seniors.

Thank you,

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¹ Prevention of Falls in Community-Dwelling Older Adults, Topic Page. U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/uspsfalls.htm>