



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
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Commissioner

DOHMH Advisory #22

Prevent Falls Among Older Adults

- **Routinely screen and assess all patients 65 years and older for risk of falling.**
- **Recommend a combination of prevention strategies, including medication modification, vision assessment and correction, increased physical activity and removing trip-and-fall hazards from the home.**

Please distribute to all clinical staff in the Departments of Geriatrics, Family Medicine, Emergency Medicine, Internal Medicine, Pharmacy and Primary Care. Please share with your non-hospital based primary care colleagues.

September 23, 2011

Dear Colleagues,

Falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries in adults aged 65 and older. Each year in New York City, more than 24,000 adults 65 and older are treated in emergency departments, more than 18,000 are hospitalized, and about 300 die from fall injuries. In fact, more older adults are hospitalized for falls than for influenza each year. Most falls occur in the home and adults 85 and over are most at risk.

Build a falls screening assessment into your routine practice. To start the assessment, ask these questions:

- Have you fallen in the last year? How many times?
- Do you have difficulty with walking or balance?

Provide follow up assessment for all patients reporting or exhibiting difficulty with walking or balance. See ["City Health Information: Preventing Falls in Older Adults in the Community"](http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/chi/chi29-4.pdf) (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/chi/chi29-4.pdf>) for information on further assessment.

Fall Prevention Strategies

Strategies that address multiple risk factors for falls are more effective than any single intervention. Depending on a patient's risk factors, consider the following interventions:

Review and Modify Medications

Ask patients to bring in all of their medications. Stress the importance of including prescription and over-the-counter medications, as well as herbals and supplements. Ask them to describe alcohol consumption as well. Review the complete regimen and make appropriate modifications. *Consider medication reduction for patients taking psychoactive medications, or four or more different medications.*

Improve Physical Status and Mobility

Recommend an appropriate exercise program for increasing muscle strength in upper and lower extremities, flexibility in the neck, trunk and joints and improving cardiovascular fitness with exercises such as walking. Make referrals to physical or occupational therapists if special assistance is necessary.

Screen for and correct vision problems

Older adults should visit an eye care professional for a comprehensive dilated eye exam each year. This is the most effective way to identify and correct vision problems.

Reduce Home Hazards

Recommend that seniors and their care givers assess their homes with the CDC Check for Safety brochure (available in [English](http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/pubs/English/booklet_Eng_desktop-a.pdf) (http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/pubs/English/booklet_Eng_desktop-a.pdf), [Spanish](http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/pubs/Spanish/booklet_Spa_desktop-a.pdf) (http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/pubs/Spanish/booklet_Spa_desktop-a.pdf), [Chinese](http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/pubs/Chinese/booklet_Chi_desktop-a.pdf) (http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/pubs/Chinese/booklet_Chi_desktop-a.pdf)). This brochure shows common home hazards that contribute to falls and offers simple solutions for fixing them. Service providers that perform home visits can use the [GEM Environmental Assessment](http://www.environmentalgeriatrics.com/pdf/enviro_assessment.pdf) (http://www.environmentalgeriatrics.com/pdf/enviro_assessment.pdf) to look for and correct home hazards for older adults.

Additional information on risk factors, screenings and best practice interventions for fall prevention can be found online.

- New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: [“City Health Information: Preventing Falls in Older Adults in the Community”](#) (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/chi/chi29-4.pdf>) and [Preventing Falls in Older Adults](#) (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/win/older-fall2.shtml>)
- American Geriatrics Society/British Geriatrics Society: [“Clinical Practice Guideline: Prevention of Falls in Older Persons”](#) (http://www.americangeriatrics.org/health_care_professionals/clinical_practice/clinical_guidelines_recommendations/2010/)

Thank you,



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