OLDER ADULTS CAN REDUCE RISK OF FALLS WITH PHYSICAL THERAPIST-LED PROGRAMS

Falls Prevention Awareness Day aims to increase public awareness about how to prevent and reduce falls among older adults

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ALEXANDRIA, VA – As the nation observes National Falls Prevention Awareness Day today, older adults are encouraged to seek the advice of a physical therapist to reduce their risk of falls through balance and strength training, and other programs designed to keep seniors active and safe, says the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA).

"Physical therapists have so much to offer in the way of falls prevention and risk reduction," says APTA spokesperson Patrice Winter, PT, MPT MS. "After assessing an individual for his or her risk of falls, we develop an individualized program based on his or her specific needs. Some patients may only need to improve their walking ability and balance, which can be achieved through doing coordination activities such as dance steps, Tai Chi, or obstacle courses. Other patients are more complex because they have multiple health issues, take several medications, or have vision problems. These individuals may require a combination of balance exercises, strength training, and other interventions."

Research shows that a combined effect of many interacting factors increases fall risk. Age is one risk factor for falls, but does not have to be accepted as a normal consequence of aging. People who are older than 80 years do have a higher risk of falls than those who are younger. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than one third of adults ages 65 and older fall each year in the United States. Falls are the leading cause of deaths due to injuries and the most common cause of nonfatal injuries and hospital admissions for trauma for the aging population.1

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"Another important component in falls prevention is making one’s home safe," says Winter. The home is the primary location for non-fatal unintentional falls. "Removing throw rugs, rerouting electrical cords, improving lighting, and installing handrails are simple ways in which to make a home safer. These modifications are especially critical for older adults who use walking aids."

For more information, read the Physical Therapist's Guide to Falls, which includes a real life experience of a 70-year-old woman who sees a physical therapist for a falls assessment.

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The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) represents more than 77,000 physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and students of physical therapy nationwide. Learn more about conditions physical therapists can treat and find a physical therapist in your area. Consumers are encouraged to follow us on Twitter (@moveforwardpt) and Facebook.

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