



12 March 2007

Don't Fall for it in Seniors Week!

Slips, trips and falls can happen to anyone, but they tend to become more common as we get older. Many older people tend to dismiss falls as "a part of getting older", but this does not have to be the case.

With the start of Seniors Week upon us, Ambulance would like to reinforce to our aging community that falls prevention is utmost in avoiding injury and maintaining independence.

Common risk-factors for falls can include:

1) PERSONAL FACTORS

- health problems (stroke, Parkinson's disease, arthritis, diabetes, blood pressure problems, etc)
- poor balance from being inactive or unfit
- medication side effects
- poor eyesight
- clothing and footwear inadequacies
- instability due to worry, anxiety and depression

2) ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

- poor lighting (exacerbated by poor eyesight)
- slippery floor surfaces
- tripping due to "shuffling footsteps" – when we can't pick up our feet as much when we walk
- increased difficulty in managing standard structural hazards, such as stairs or shower edging
- unstable, uneven, broken, loose or wet outdoor areas.

It is important to know that many of these risk-factors can be prevented or remedied to reduce the likelihood of falls.

As you get older, Ambulance recommends that you seek advice from your local doctor about what personal factors may put you at risk of



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falling. Your doctor can help you to make a plan of action about how to reduce these risks.

Additionally, it is important to be aware of what environmental factors are causing/may cause you a problem. There are a number of organisations that can assist by coming to your house and identifying potential problems. For more information, you should contact your area health service, your doctor, or the Department of Health & Ageing.

Ambulance also supports the use of Personal Alarms, available from a number of different organisations. These alarms summon help for you if you cannot get to a phone. They are usually worn on a pendant around the neck so that they are always accessible.

If you do suffer a slip, trip or fall, Ambulance recommends that you follow some simple steps:

- **call Triple Zero immediately and ask for Ambulance** (or use a personal alarm to summon help) – Ambulance is **available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week** to help you if you fall, or are sick or injured. It is important that you call at the time that you fall – *do not wait until the morning*, as this can create more problems and exacerbate existing ones.
- remember – call Ambulance first. You can notify your family at a later time, or the Ambulance or hospital can help you to contact them. Ambulance crews are highly trained to assist in your time of need, and get to you quickly in an emergency.
- if you have increased pain in your hips, neck or back it is very important to stay as still as possible until the ambulance arrives.
- answer all questions that the Ambulance Officers ask you as factually as possible – the answers you give will not lead to you being admitted unnecessarily. They will help the health services to give you the best care, and can actually help improve your independence.
- keep a list of medications, allergies, health care history, and important numbers (such as Medicare, Veterans Affairs and next of kin phone numbers) with you at all times.

~ ENDS ~

For further information or local media opportunities please contact Ambulance Media on (02) 9320 7796.