Preventing Falls in the Elderly

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The High Cost of Falls

- In 2013, the cost of falls in the US was $34 billion
- In the year 2009, the cost to treat fall related hospitalizations in elderly Vermonters was $39,400,000
- Falls are the leading cause of fatal and non-fatal injuries for older Americans. Annually there are:
  - 2.8 million injuries treated in emergency departments
  - 800,000 hospitalizations
  - 27,000 deaths
- According to the 2014 Vermont Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey:
  - 125 Vermont adults over 65 died as a result of a fall in 2014
  - 5,445 went to local emergency departments due to a fall
  - 1,600 adults in Vermont were hospitalized
Start Preventing Falls with 3 Simple Steps

- Screen-3 questions
  - Have you fallen in the past year?
  - Do you feel unsteady when standing or walking?
  - Do you worry about falling?

- Review
  - Review and manage medications linked to falls

- Recommend
  - Recommend vitamin D for improved bone, muscle and nerve health
    - Grade B recommendation by the USPSTF
Screening for Falls

- STEADI Functional Assessments
  - 30 Second Chair Stand Test
    - Used to assess a patient’s leg strength and endurance
  - 4-Stage Balance Test
    - Used to assess a patient’s balance
  - Timed Up and Go (TUG) Test
    - Used to assess a patient’s mobility
  - Measuring Orthostatic Blood Pressure
    - Used to determine if a patient may have postural hypotension
Evidence Based Fall Prevention Programs

- Weekly thai chi at Good Living Senior Center in St. Johnsbury
- Otago
  - Series of 17 strength and balance exercises delivered by a physical therapist in the home, out patient or community setting
  - 8 week clinical phase and then transition to a self management phase for 4-10 months
- A Matter of Balance
  - Two eight hour sessions
  - Participants learn to control the fear of falling, find ways to change their environment to reduce fall risk factors and learn simple exercises to improve balance and strength
  - Free at UVM Medical Center
  - Have been programs in the Northeast Kingdom in the past
Conversations about Fall Prevention

- How patients view falls is important!!
- Patient says: Falls just happen when you get older
- Provider: It’s true that falling is very common. About a third of all seniors fall each year. But you don’t have to fall. There are specific things you can do to reduce your chances of falling.

- Patient- I’d like to exercise but I don’t because I’m afraid I’ll get too tired.
- Provider-You can reduce your chances of falling by doing strength and balance exercises as little as 3 times a week. And you don’t have to overexert yourself to benefit.
References