



Preventing Falls in the Elderly

REBECCA ROBBINS

CLERKSHIP #1-FAMILY MEDICINE ROTATION

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT LARNER COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

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 (4)
- ▶ 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

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