

## Don't Take That Fall!

Falling is a risky business for East End seniors – but the good news is that most falls are avoidable and that falling **is not** a normal consequence of aging.

Statistics predict that approximately one out of every four of the nation's seniors will have a fall this year and worse, that 250,000 of them will break a hip and a large percentage of those will never regain full mobility. Falls are the number one cause of emergency room visits and hospitalizations among people 75 years or older. Even when a fall doesn't result in serious physical injury, just the fear of falling can lead to self-imposed inactivity that increases loss of strength, decreases flexibility and contributes to gradual loss of functional independence. Almost 40% of all nursing home admissions are related to gait instability.

Although we can't accurately predict who will fall, we can identify those who are at greater risk. They include people with significant medical diagnoses – such as diabetes or Parkinson's Disease – and others with a combination of small impairments that place them at risk. These include lower extremity weakness, stiff knee and ankle joints, impaired sensation in their limbs and poor vision. Taking more than four medications can also be a factor in falling, especially if they cause lightheadedness or dizziness.

**Prevention IS the Best Medicine!**

There are many things seniors can do to prevent falls. First, they can eliminate the most preventable risk factors – environmental hazards such as sliding throw rugs, steps without railings and hallway clutter. Second, they can exercise extra caution during bad weather when the ground can be wet or icy.

Third, they can do exercises or take classes to help strengthen their bodies and increase their stability, and Southampton Hospital's special Functional Fitness program was designed just for that purpose. Functional Fitness is an enjoyable way for those over 55 to learn how to prolong their physical well-being and quality of life. It focuses on strength, balance and flexibility training, using regular exercise to help seniors feel better mentally and physically, improve their health and maintain their independence as they grow older.

The program is fully supervised and is a great way to learn exercises that later can be incorporated into a home exercise program. Coordinated by Debra Jensen, PTA, the program is offered Tuesdays and Thursdays from noon to 4 p.m. at a nominal cost. All participants will have a personalized program designed to help them reach their own short- and long-term fitness goals.

*To learn more about Southampton Hospital's Functional Fitness classes and other Physical Rehabilitation and Sports Therapy services, call us at 631-726-8520.*