

EXERCISES TO PREVENT FALLS AMONG ADULTS WITH ARTHRITIS

According to the CDC, falls are the leading cause of injury-related morbidity and mortality among seniors. Each year, at least 250,000 older people are hospitalized for hip fractures. More than 95% of hip fractures are caused by falls. Other major consequences of falls include brain injuries, decline in functional abilities, and reductions in social and physical activities.

Poor musculoskeletal function, which is common among adults with arthritis, is a major risk factor for falling. Arthritis often leads to a weakening of the muscles that help with balance and stability and causes joint pain that can affect an individual's gait. As a result, those with arthritis are at a much greater risk of falling than those without arthritis. The CDC found that those with arthritis were more than twice as likely to report two or more falls or a fall-related injury as those without arthritis.

Research has shown that exercise can help decrease the risk of falls. Below are examples of exercises that are known to build strength and improve balance and flexibility to help people with arthritis reduce the risk – and fear – of falling.

Exercises

1. **Walking**- a great endurance and stability builder that is good for arthritis as it is low impact. Walk with a Doc, walk on your own, or Walk With Ease! (*WWE is an Arthritis Foundation program in self-directed or group format*).
2. **Tai Chi**- an Ancient Chinese martial art that involves slow, continuous movement designed to increase strength and balance. Two programs you may find in your community include Tai Chi for Arthritis or Tai Ji Quan: Moving for Better Balance.
3. **Aquatic exercises**- water aerobics, and stretches are great for building endurance and muscle strength. Local YMCA or Parks and Rec facilities often host water aerobics programs, like the Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program.
4. **Balance exercises**- include standing on one foot, walking heel to toe, hip extensions, side leg raises, and back leg raises and are great for increasing balance and stability, decreasing the risk of falling. Examples of programs you may find in your community include: A Matter of Balance, Tai Ji Quan: Moving for Better Balance, EnhanceFitness®, and Fit & Strong!
5. **Strength training**- involves using your own body weight or lifting small weights to help strengthen muscles and decrease the risk of falling; strength training should target the area affected by arthritis to help decrease risk of falling. Programs in your community include EnhanceFitness®, and Fit & Strong!
6. **Yoga**- can help increase balance, flexibility, and stability.
7. **Stretching**- will increase flexibility and, by extension, balance and stability.

When doing any of these exercises, it is important to remember to modify your activity according to your limitations. If you have any questions about which exercises are safe for you to do, or which exercises would benefit you the most, consult your health care provider. Physical therapists can assess your balance and make

recommendations of appropriate exercises and strategies to reduce your risk for falls and help keep you physically active.

References and Resources:

CDC website for Home & Recreational Safety > Older Adult Falls, accessed July 2016:

<http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationsafety/falls/index.html>

everyday HEALTH website: 7 Fall-Prevention Exercises for People with Arthritis, accessed July 2016:

<http://www.everydayhealth.com/arthritispictures/fall-prevention-exercises-for-people-with-arthritis.aspx>

CDC Physical Activity Programs (Recommended and Promising):

<http://www.cdc.gov/arthritispictures/physical-activity.html>

The exercise programs listed above can be found in your community through the following sources:

- Arthritis Foundation Resource Finder: <http://resourcefinder.arthritis.org>
- YMCA: <http://www.ymca.net/enhancefitness/> (search the YMCA in your local community)
- National Council on Aging: Healthy Aging > Falls Prevention: <https://www.ncoa.org/healthy-aging/falls-prevention/>
- Evidence-Based Leadership Council program locator: <http://www.eblcprograms.org/evidence-based/map-of-programs/>