

Injuries From Falls

Overview

Falls occur in all industries, in all occupations, and in a myriad of work settings.¹ However, many are preventable.

- Every year between 1997 and 2007, falls were the leading cause of injury for people of all ages.²
- More than eight million individuals are treated in hospital emergency departments each year for non-fatal injuries related to falls.⁴
- Falls are the number one cause of unintentional injury death among adults 65 years and older.³ Each year, more than 30% of adults over the age of 65 suffer a fall and 15% fall at least twice.⁵
- The primary causes of falls for adults over 18 years include:^{6,7}
 - Alcohol use
 - Illness or use of medications that affect balance
 - Poor vision
 - Gait or balance problems or slow reflexes
 - Neurological and musculoskeletal problems
 - Impaired thinking and memory
 - Environmental hazards

Costs and Impact

- A 'Slip, Trip, and Fall' prevention program implemented in three acute care hospitals resulted in a 59% reduction of worker's compensation claims.⁸
- In 2000, direct medical costs of falls among people ages 65 and older totaled over \$19 billion with \$179 million for fatal falls and \$19 billion for nonfatal fall injuries. This is over \$26 billion in 2010 dollars.⁹
- Multifaceted fall intervention programs for adults ages 65 and older (exercise, medication adjustment and behavioral interventions) can save an average of \$2,000 in total health care costs per person and reduce the total number of falls among those at high risk of falling.¹⁰

Employer Strategies for Prevention

ON THE JOB

- **Examine claims data** and workers' compensation to determine the causes and locations of the majority of fall injuries.⁸
- Work with your vendor to ensure that employees are taking advantage of the **100% coverage for preventive services**. Annual screenings and physicals are important ways to check on conditions



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Falls represent the second highest percentage of injury-attributable productivity losses at over \$74 billion [2010], second only to motor vehicle accidents.³

that can increase the risk for falls, such as osteoporosis, medication side effects, history of falls and impaired vision.^{9,11}

- Train employees on the proper use of equipment, particularly **ladders, step stools and boom lifts** (also known as cherry pickers). One of the serious and often deadly hazards in the workplace is falls from elevations.¹
- Keep floors in work areas clean and dry. Water, grease and other fluids can make walking surfaces slippery. Well-documented clean-up procedures, correct floor cleaning, proper usage of mats and signs, and accessible clean-up materials will help to **minimize the risk of slipping**.⁸
- Provide adequate lighting in all employee work areas. **Inadequate lighting impairs vision** and one's ability to see hazards. Install more lights and verify that the correct voltage is being used for maximum brightness.⁸
- Consider providing incentives and/or discounts for employees and retirees who participate in exercise programs, join a gym, or use a personal trainer. Muscle weakness and loss of lower body strength are well-known risk factors for older adult falls.³ Evidence shows that **well-designed exercise programs** may reduce the risk of falls in people ages 65 and older.^{12,13}
- Consider providing 100% coverage for **calcium and vitamin D supplements** among older employees. These can help reduce loss of bone strength and prevent falls.^{9,13}

IN THE HOME

- Educate employees about **where they are most at risk**: 60% of falls happen at home, 30% happen in the community, and 10% happen in institutions such as nursing homes.¹¹

- Educate employees about environmental strategies to **keep their children safe**:¹⁴
 - Use safety gates at the top and bottom of stairs.
 - Move chairs, cribs and other furniture away from windows.
 - Consider installing window guards.
 - Avoid playground equipment that uses asphalt, concrete, grass or soil beneath it; instead, look for those that use shredded rubber, mulch, wood chips or fine sand.
- Discourage employees from letting children use baby walkers, which send more than 14,000 children to the hospital each year for falls and other injuries.¹⁵
- Encourage employees with older adults living at home to increase safety by reducing tripping hazards, adding grab bars and railings, placing non-skid mats in tubs and improving lighting.¹⁶

Useful Resources

- Mayo Clinic: [*Fall Prevention: 6 Ways to Reduce Your Falling Risk.*](#)
- American Academy of Pediatrics: [*TIPP: The Injury Prevention Program.*](#)
- National Institute on Aging: [*Falls and Fractures.*](#)
- National Center for Injury Prevention and Control: [*Falls: Older Adults.*](#)



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