



A Matter of Balance: Managing Concerns about Falls

active aging



You probably know someone who has fallen or who is afraid of falling. According to *The New England Journal of Medicine*, one out of three Americans over age 65 will fall each year. Falls are

a real concern to many older adults, because they can cause serious injuries such as fractures, broken bones, or head trauma. If you limit your physical activity to reduce your risk of falling, it can lead to balance problems, as well as reduced muscle tone and strength. The good news is that falls can be prevented by taking some simple steps to keep yourself or someone you love safe.

Exercise on a regular basis. Activities including Tai Chi, walking, water aerobics, and strength training (lifting weights) are especially good for helping to build muscle and maintain balance. Be sure to talk to your doctor before starting any type of physical activity program.

Wear appropriate footwear. Your shoes should have supportive low heels with rubber soles.

Have your vision checked on a regular basis. Poor vision increases your risk of falling.

Talk to a medical professional about medications you are taking. If you are taking four or more medications, you increase the risk of interactions and side effects from the drugs that in turn may increase your risk of falling.

Improve your lighting around your home. Use high wattage light bulbs, keep night lights on while sleeping, and have a flashlight close by your bed.

Remove safety hazards in your home. Remove anything on the floor or in your living area that could cause you to fall, such as a throw rug, extension cord, a spill on the floor, or soap residue in the bathtub.

Take your time! Don't rush to get out of bed, get up from a chair, or answer the phone.

A Matter of Balance is a program to help reduce the fear of falling among older adults. The program includes eight two-hour sessions, which are led by community volunteers who act as "coaches" to help participants learn to view their fear of falling as something they can control. Participants also set goals for increasing their physical activity and learn simple exercises to increase strength and balance. Contact your local senior center to find out if they can arrange *A Matter of Balance* program for your community.

Sources: Tinetti, M. (2003). *Preventing Falls in Elderly Persons*. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 348, 42-49.

A Matter of Balance: Managing Concerns about Falls, MaineHealth's Partnership of Healthy Aging; Boston University.

Hamilton County Fall Prevention Task Force, Hamilton County Public Health, Cincinnati, OH.

Submitted by Jennifer Even, Extension Educator, Family and Consumer Sciences/Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, Ohio State University Extension, Hamilton County.

Think to Drink



Dehydration is a common occurrence in older adults. Humans can survive 50 days without food, but only a few days without drinking. So why is fluid intake so important? Grab a good glass of water and read on.

About 60 percent of an adult man's weight and about 55 percent of an adult woman's weight is comprised of water. Two-thirds of that water is found within our cells. Every one of our body's systems depend on water. While the exact amount of water each person needs to consume each day varies greatly, be sure to consume at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day (roughly 1.9 liters) to maintain your body's fluid balance. In addition to what you drink, liquid is also ingested in some of the foods you eat. However, the body is constantly losing water. Loss occurs through such activities as breathing, urinating, perspiring, and some medical conditions, such as fevers or burns. The loss of water within the body also varies greatly based upon environment. When in warmer, humid climates you lose more water than in cool, dry climates.

As we age, we become more susceptible to dehydration. One reason for this is because older adults lose their sense of thirst. As the sense of thirst diminishes, you may experience dehydration resulting in confusion, as well as pathological conditions such as hypertension, heart disease, and renal disease. Although fluid cures thirst, there are other reasons to grab that glass of water. People drink to reduce mouth pain caused by hot or spicy foods, reduce dry mouth caused by diseases and medications, and to facilitate moistening of dry food while eating.

As we age, we must re-teach ourselves to drink more frequently. Keep fluids visible and readily available. A small pitcher of water and a glass on the night stand, end table, and dining room table makes getting a drink handy. So grab another glass of water for now, and be sure to take a full, eco-friendly, reusable water bottle with you wherever you go.

References: Hodgkinson, B., Evans, D., and Wood, J. (2003). Maintaining oral hydration in older adults: a systematic review. International Journal of Nursing Practice. (9)3, S19-S28.

Saltmarsh, M. (2001). Thirst: or, why do people drink? Nutrition Bulletin. (26)1, 53-58.

Submitted by Linda Vogel, LSW, Planning and Quality Improvement Specialist, Area Agency on Aging 10B.



Liberating Losses: When Death Brings Relief

by Jennifer Elison, Ed.D and
Chris McGonigle, Ph.D.
Lifelong Books, 2003.

Inescapably, most of us feel both sadness and despair after the loss of a loved one. However, for some grievors in specific or complicated situations, an unexpected feeling of relief may also come. Relief or peace may come from knowing that the person is no longer suffering from a prolonged or painful illness. Others may indeed be relieved that they are now free from a conflicted or once destructive relationship.

In this book, two counseling professionals share a compilation of stories from their own counseling practice, as well as insights from their personal experiences. They weave a well-written handbook to offer insights and help to those who are dealing with the death of a loved family member, and the feelings of relief, or "letting go," that can sometimes occur.

*Submitted by Jenny Justi, LISW-S,
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Lillian



Lillian has been a special friend of mine for the past 37 years and celebrated

her 90th birthday in March. Born in Hartford, Connecticut, Lillian is the daughter of Italian immigrants. She worked at the billing department in Fox's Department Store, where she used a comptometer (precursor to the calculator) to process customers' billing statements. Then she met her future husband and after their marriage moved

with him to a little island off the coast of Connecticut to help him care for several large summer estates. Lillian was an avid reader and enjoyed cooking big Sunday lunches for the family.

After 50 years of island living, Lillian made the big adjustment of moving to Ohio when a ten-day visit for cataract surgery turned into ten years of living with our family. Lillian fills her days with enjoying the scenery outside, walks on pleasant days, and watching her favorite news shows on television. One of her favorite channels is the Food Channel, and we reminisce about

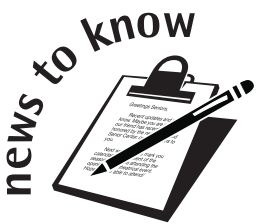
some of her cooking experiences and favorite recipes. The state's PASSPORT program helped us keep Lillian in our home for nine years.

Lillian is known for her wonderful attitude toward life. She always has a smile on her face and a friendly wave to her friends as we pass through the halls of the nursing home where she has lived for the past year. Their care has been a real blessing to our family.

I'm glad to have Lillian as my senior friend and mother-in-law!

By Cindy Oliveri, Ohio State University Extension.

Help With Costs of Prescription Drugs



For years you did your part by paying into Medicare. Now it's your turn to get the most out of the benefits you've earned. If you have a limited income, you know that sometimes means going without to make ends meet. That

shouldn't mean going without your medications, so there's a special program that allows you to pay no more than \$2.40 for a generic drug and \$6 for a brand name drug.

If you qualify, this program helps pay your prescription co-payments, plus other costs like monthly premiums and annual deductibles offered through the Medicare prescription drug program. Many people qualify for this extra help and don't even know it. The catch—you have to apply! Applying for the program is free.

Individuals who make less than \$16,245 a year, or couples who make less than \$21,855, may qualify to have lower Medicare prescription drug premiums, co-payments, and deductibles. To qualify, your resources (bank accounts, stocks and bonds, but not your house or car) must be limited to \$12,510 for an individual or \$25,010 for a couple. If you have applied before and been denied, but your financial situation has changed, you can reapply to see if you qualify under the current guidelines.

If you meet these guidelines, you can apply online at www.socialsecurity.gov or call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 and ask for the *Application for Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs*. Act now to make sure you can get the prescription drugs you need at a cost you can afford.

Submitted by Deanna Clifford, Manager of Consumer Education and Outreach, Ohio Department of Aging.

Give Your Medicare Coverage a Check-up!



Just like you get (or should get) a check-up by a health professional each year, your Medicare coverage needs a check-up each year, too. At a minimum, you should review the prescription drug coverage you have through Medicare, or an employer or retiree plan, and deter-

mine whether it will provide you with the best possible coverage at the best cost in the new year. Remember: prescription drug plans can change from year to year, including how much you pay in a monthly premium and what drugs the plan will cover.

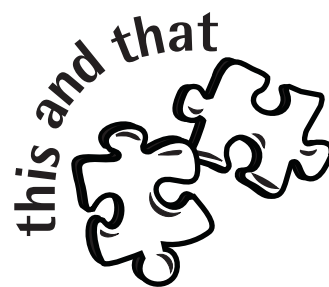
You may also want to review your medical coverage through Medicare. If you have traditional Medicare, you may want to consider a Medicare Advantage plan. Medicare Advantage plans offer all of the services offered in traditional Medicare Parts A and B, and may also offer some additional services such as eye care or other benefits. Most of these plans include prescription drug coverage as part of the benefits package, but make sure you know what a plan covers before you sign up. Things to consider include:

- **Costs**—What are the monthly premiums, deductibles, and co-payments for each plan?
- **Choice**—Does the plan include my doctor(s), hospitals, and other services?
- **Benefits**—What does the plan include and are there any "extras" beyond what Medicare usually covers?
- **Quality**—Learn more about quality and satisfaction with the plans at www.medicare.gov.

The annual open-enrollment period for Medicare Part D and Medicare Health Plans begins November 15 and lasts through December 31. This is your opportunity to switch plans if the coverage you have won't work for you in 2010. Reviewing your coverage during open enrollment ensures that you don't have any unpleasant surprises when you go to the pharmacy in January!

So you're ready for your check-up ... now what? You can review your health plan coverage on your own at www.medicare.gov. The web site includes health plan comparison tools that will assist you as you review your coverage. The Ohio Senior Health Insurance Information Program (OSHIIP) is hosting "Medicare Check-up Days" this fall around the state. Contact them at 1-800-686-1578 for information on the date and location nearest you.

Submitted by Deanna Clifford, Manager of Consumer Education and Outreach, Ohio Department of Aging.



The Senior Series Team

In this issue of *Senior Hotline*, I thought I would give you a little background about how this newsletter came to be written. In 1992, a group of professionals interested in seniors (those over the age of 55) came together to learn and share resources available in the area of study called gerontology. The "Senior Series Team," as we call ourselves, is a group of professionals who work with Ohio State University Extension and the Aging Network around the state of Ohio.

We continue to meet and share the latest research and public policy concerning seniors. We also develop materials that are available as teaching lessons, fact sheets, and of course this newsletter, the *Senior Hotline*. You can find many of these materials online at: seniorseries.osu.edu and at: ohioline.osu.edu and through your local OSU Extension office.

Submitted by Linnette Mizer Goard, Extension Educator, Family and Consumer Sciences, Ohio State University Extension, Lorain County.

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Series

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