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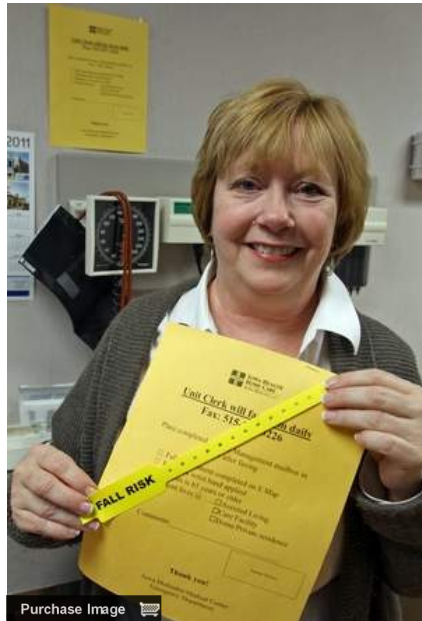
# Falls can lead to injury, loss of mobility

## Health care organizations across Iowa emphasize fall prevention.

4:20 PM, Sep. 20, 2011 | Comments

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Karen Jones, trauma and injury prevention coordinator for Iowa Health — Des Moines, holds a yellow wrist band and form for senior patients who have fallen. Patients at the Iowa Methodist Medical Center Emergency Room fill out the form which is faxed to Iowa Home Health Care, which offers a home safety screening. / BILL NEIBERGALL/THE REGISTER

For senior citizens, falling could mean the loss of independence, and in many cases, serious injury or death. Health care organizations across Iowa are targeting that population during National Falls Awareness Day, appropriately scheduled for Friday, the first day of fall.

At Iowa Methodist Medical Center, falls are the main reason patients seek trauma care, said Karen Jones, trauma and injury prevention coordinator for Iowa Health – Des Moines. In 2010, 4,001 patients visited Methodist’s emergency room due to a fall. Of those, 2,225 were older than age 65.

“When older people fall, a lot of times that leads them to a loss of their independence and mobility. We want to be able to prevent that. We want them to be able to stay at home and have fun in their lives and not have to go to skilled care or assisted living,” Jones said.

### Screening

On Friday, representatives from Iowa Home Health Care and Outpatient Therapy will offer balance screening and blood pressure checks in the atrium at Methodist. They’ll also provide information on the Matter of Balance class, which helps seniors control their fear of falls, review their environmental risks and promote exercise to improve strength and balance.

In Iowa, falls are the leading cause of non-fatal injury and death among adults age 65 and older, with slipping or tripping falls the most common, according to the Iowa Department of Public Health. The cost of hospitalization care in Iowa for falls is roughly \$92 million annually, and the total charges for emergency visits due to falls is about \$35 million per year.

Written by ESTELA VILLANUEVA-WHITMAN | REGISTER CORRESPONDENT

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**Fall prevention tips:**

Begin a regular exercise program. Exercise that improves balance and coordination, such as tai chi, are the most helpful.

Have a health care provider review your medications. Some may make you dizzy or sleepy.

Get your vision checked annually.

Make your home safer

Wear shoes inside and outside. Avoid being barefoot or wearing slippers.

Remove trip hazards, including small throw rugs, clutter and electrical cords.

Keep frequently used items in easy-to-reach cabinets.

Use non-slip mats in the bathtub and shower.

Install grab bars near the toilet and in the shower.

Improve the lighting in your home.

Source: Centers for Disease Control

The department is forming a statewide Falls Prevention Coalition to help groups educate seniors. Binnie LeHew, who coordinates injury prevention activities through the state department, said some groups have sponsored talks in senior centers or used place mats to raise awareness.

The coalition hopes to recruit more organizations to create action steps for fall prevention and provide support for more evidence-based programming for seniors.

**Falls can be fatal**

Falls can result in minor lacerations, or fatal injuries due to bleeding from a head wound or hip fracture. Those on blood thinners need to be especially cautious. The most serious injury for seniors is rib fractures, Jones said. Seniors with two or more broken ribs have a high incidence of mortality.

Jones is also chairperson of a Falls Committee formed to address the issue at Methodist. In the hospital, "fall risk" signs

are posted outside patient doors and staff members take patients to the bathroom before bed so they don't get up at night.

In the emergency room, patients wear a yellow wrist band indicating they have fallen or are a fall risk and fill out a yellow survey that is faxed to Iowa Home Health Care. Representatives then follow up by offering a home safety screening, a service typically covered through Medicare.

During the visit, staff review medications, conduct a balance screening, and look for risks in the home. They may also make suggestions to improve lighting, remove trip hazards or add grab bars in the bathroom. About 16 percent of patients have had a safety check performed, Jones said.



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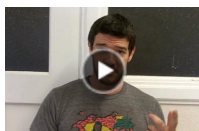
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