

syracuse.com

September is Fall Prevention Awareness Month (Your letters)

Your Letters By **Your Letters**

on September 16, 2014 at 6:15 AM

To the Editor:

September is a time for returning to school and for changing leaves. As summer turns to fall, it also provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of preventing falls, especially among seniors.

Fall Prevention Awareness Month is being celebrated throughout the month of September, with a theme of "Strong Today, Falls Free Tomorrow." Highlighted with Fall Prevention Awareness Day on the first day of fall, this month-long effort unites professionals, caregivers, family members and communities in raising awareness of, and preventing, falls in the older adult population.

Because of the prevalence of falls and the fact that they are a universal problem not specific to any one region, they need to garner as much - or more - attention as other medical issues affecting the aging population.

Consider that:

- One-third of adults over age 65 fall each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).
- Falls can result in serious health issues, including fractures, head trauma and other injuries. In fact, the CDC reports that falls are the leading cause of both fatal and nonfatal injuries among seniors.
- Every 15 seconds, an older adult is seen in an emergency department for a fall-related injury (National Council on Aging).
- The repercussions of health issues resulting from falls also mean higher health care costs. Treatment for a fractured hip, for example, can result in exorbitant costs for surgery and rehabilitation.

Why are falls so common among seniors, and how can they be prevented? Falls should not be considered a normal part of aging, but changes to the body that occur normally with aging do increase the risk. Eyesight becomes less sharp and more limited. Physical reaction times and strength decrease. In addition, medications can cause to dizziness, sleepiness and other side effects.

Thankfully, there are steps people can take to prevent a fall or to reduce the likelihood of experiencing one. These include getting screened regularly for risk factors, such as routinely seeing medical professionals for eye exams, blood pressure monitoring, medication review, foot exams and balance testing. Other tips involve beginning a regular exercise program that includes strength and balance training and making the home as safe

as possible. Remove possible obstructions and adequate lighting, especially in hallways and bathrooms, and install handrails and lights on all stairs.

Raising awareness of these tips is part of Fall Prevention Awareness Month's focus. Across the country, many groups and organizations will be spreading the message about falls prevention. The CDC and the National Council on Aging will offer information and resources, such as public service announcements, posters, webinars and toolkits.

Here in our area, seniors and their families can learn more about falls prevention while they are eating out at a restaurant. HCR Home Care is providing placemats to some restaurants here in Onondaga County and across the state. HCR's placemats feature tips on how to avoid falls, as well as falls prevention-related word searches and other activities.

During Fall Prevention Awareness Month - and throughout the year - area residents and particularly seniors need to be aware of the risks associated with falls and of the ways they can help avoid them. We can't prevent summer from turning to fall, but we can do everything possible to prevent falls.

Judy Daniel

Regional Director of Therapeutic Services

HCR Home Care

Rochester

© 2014 syracuse.com. All rights reserved.