

Fall Prevention Assessment and Exercise Recommendations

Jordan Walter*, Samuel Aitchison*, Katelyn Gochenour
Faculty: Kayla Keuter
Department of Physician Assistant, College of Health Professions

INTRODUCTION: As the aging population of the United States rises, falls will become more prevalent². Exercise is an effective way of reducing falls in older adults and should be routinely prescribed to the appropriate patient¹¹. Although, screening tools, standardized algorithms, and fall prevention education tools are available to health care providers and institutions; only 8% of healthcare providers use these available resources¹⁰. It is recommended that health care providers take part in preventing injuries associated with falls.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this paper is to provide fall prevention assessment tools and exercise recommendations to reduce falls in the elderly.

METHODS: Articles were compiled using 4 databases: MEDLINE, Cochrane, PubMed, and CINAHL. Search terms were: exercise, older adults, fall prevention, strength training, proprioception, aerobic, hip fractures, mortality. Center for Disease Control and National Institute of Health were also utilized for information.

RESULTS: Utilization of screening tools, such as the Center for Disease Control's "Stopping the Elderly Accidents, Deaths, & Injury" algorithm, will help health care providers identify patients at high risk of falling. Moderate and high fall risk patients should be referred to physical therapy where further testing and therapy can be initiated. Low fall risk patients can be prescribed exercises and should be provided with resources for standardized exercise programs. Combination exercises using endurance, balance, and strength training have the greatest efficacy in reducing falls; a 22% reduction¹². Strength training reduces the incidence of falls¹⁴; balance training was found to be effective only when paired with other exercise programs¹². More research is needed to definitively say endurance training alone is effective in reducing falls¹².

CONCLUSION: Falls become more prevalent as the population ages. Healthcare providers are encouraged to assess their older patients for fall risk. Many screening tools are available to identify patients at risk. Combination exercise programs, including balance, endurance, and strengthening, are found to be the most beneficial form of exercise in preventing falls in older patients.