

hollywood physical therapy associates

HEALTH WATCH

Health Watch is a quarterly publication from Hollywood Physical Therapy Associates to raise awareness of important health issues and to underscore the value of quality, personal physical therapy. With proper evaluation, a complete physical therapy program could prevent injury, promote good health maintenance and improve quality of life for certain individuals.

TAKING CARE OF THE ELDERLY

The general population is living longer so it is important to consider what can be done to help keep the elderly fit and healthy. Preventing falls is of utmost importance, since falls are the 5th leading cause of death in patients over the age of 65.

Preventing falls also means preventing disabilities.

Falls lead to fractures especially in those patients who suffer from osteoporosis. The most common fracture sites are the hips, spine and wrists. Falling backwards causes more spine fractures and head injuries, while falling forward often causes hand and leg fractures.

Osteoporosis is a silent disease, which is often diagnosed after a fall.

The National Osteoporosis Foundation (NOF, www.nof.org) states that 25% of patients who sustain a fracture end up in a convalescent home and lose their independence, often forever. The total number of Americans age 50 and older affected by osteoporosis is expected to increase to more than 61 million by 2020. At present approximately 10 million Americans suffer from osteoporosis, 80% of whom are women.

Fractures do not only break bones, they also break self-confidence. Fear of falling makes a person more sedentary. This in turn causes greater weakness and lack of mobility. The problem increases if endurance is affected and there is reduced cardio-vascular fitness. It is a downward spiral with the probability of more falls and total loss of independence.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

First of all it is important for the attending physician to ask elderly patients if they have fallen once or more frequently in the past year.

If the answer is yes, it is important to:

1. Review the patient's medication, especially if the patient takes more than four different meds: Is there any medication, which could make the patient feel dizzy or faint?

2. Re-evaluate the patient's vision. Poor vision can cause falls. Recently a patient who had fallen frequently without apparent cause (no dizziness or fainting) disclosed that her central vision had worsened and she depended on her

peripheral vision. Consequently she could not detect objects in front of her. Prism glasses might have helped her prevent falls.

3. Let a therapist evaluate posture, strength, endurance, mobility, balance, coordination, sensation, and proprioception. After a thorough evaluation a custom tailored exercise program can improve strength, balance and coordination, as well as proprioception. Stretching, muscular mobilization and sometimes modalities in combination with the above treatments can improve muscle strength and function.

SUMMARY:

Treating the elderly before they fall can prevent fractures, increase strength, balance and cardio-vascular condition. Keeping the elderly fit saves on health care costs, increases the quality of life and allows the elderly population to live longer independently.

(Excerpts from a lecture presented by Beate Carrière, PT, CIFK at the European conference of prevention of disease in Vienna, Austria Nov. 27-30, 2002)

Hollywood Physical Therapy Associates was founded by Mary Rosenberg in 1991 in order to practice a more personal approach to physical therapy. We pride ourselves on delivering professional, comprehensive care to all patients. Our caring staff, private treatment rooms and state-of-the-art facility insures patients will receive the finest care possible.