Balance, Falls, and Safety in the Home

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June 6, 2008
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FALL PREVENTION

(OR HOW TO STAY ON YOUR FEET)
A fall is...

- An unintentional event that results in an individual coming to rest on the ground or on another lower level.
Falls lead to nursing home placement.

- In a study by Wheelock, et al. in 2003, motor impairments with frequent falls were the leading predictor of nursing home placement in HD.
Causes of Falls

○ WEAKNESS
○ POOR BALANCE
○ MEDICATIONS
○ FATIGUE
○ PERCEPTUAL IMPAIRMENTS
WEAKNESS

- HIP, KNEE AND ANKLE MUSCLES ALL AFFECT BALANCE

- A GREAT DEAL OF STRENGTH IS LOST WITH INACTIVITY
POOR BALANCE

- DECREASED REACTION TIME
- DECREASED COORDINATION OF MOVEMENT
- DECREASED SPEED OF MOVEMENT
- DECREASED ABILITY TO DO TWO THINGS AT ONCE
MEDICATIONS

- 4 OR MORE MEDICATIONS INCREASE FALL RISK
- SIDE EFFECTS INCLUDE: LOW BLOOD PRESSURE, DIZZINESS, DROWSINESS, AND UNSTEADINESS
FATIGUE

- FATIGUE IN HD IS UNDERESTIMATED
- MUSCLE FATIGUE IS NOT ALWAYS RECOGNIZED
PERCEPTUAL IMPAIRMENTS

- DIFFICULTY VISUALLY SCANNING
- DEPTH PERCEPTION PROBLEMS
- IMPAIRED VISUAL ACUITY
- DARK ADAPTATION
WHAT YOU CAN DO...

- **EXERCISE** to improve strength, balance and endurance
- Monitor **MEDICATIONS** to minimize side effects
- Preserve **VISION** : wear glasses if needed, increase lighting
- **REST** muscles...take frequent breaks
SAFETY AT HOME

- Clean up clutter
- Limit furniture and obstacles
- Take up throw rugs
- Limit stair climbing
- Turn on lights
- Program phones for emergencies
- Turn down the water heater
- Install door alarms
- and keyless entry
Bathroom

- Shower Seat
- Grab bars
- Non-slip mats
- Hand-held Shower Hose
Kitchen

- Move items to counter height
- Lock cabinets holding chemicals
- Remove knobs from stove
- Use plastic and disposable products
Energy Conservation and Work Simplification

- Take rest breaks between activity
- Plan ahead, use a schedule
- Set priorities
- Break down tasks into smaller steps
REFERENCES

- Tinetti M. Risk factors for falls among elderly persons living in the community. NEJM 1988. 1701-1706