

August 2010

Injury Prevention Brief

Unintentional falls are the leading cause of injury death among adults age 65 and older in Oklahoma.

Most fall-related injuries can be prevented through behavioral changes and home modifications.

Safety and Prevention Information

<http://ips.health.ok.gov>

INJURY PREVENTION SERVICE

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Fall-related Injuries Among Older Adults

- More than one-third of adults 65 years of age and older fall and many suffer from fall-related injuries each year in the United States. In 2008, falls were the leading cause of nonfatal unintentional injury among adults 55 years of age and older.
- The risk of serious fall-related injuries increases with age, particularly for persons 65 years of age and older.
- In Oklahoma, falls are the leading cause of unintentional injury death among adults age 65 and older.
- From 2004 to 2007, an average of 230 Oklahomans died each year as a result of an unintentional fall. Seventy-five percent of fatal fall injuries occurred in the age 65 and older population.
- For every fall-related death in Oklahoma, there were 40 hospitalizations for a fall-related injury.

A few prevention tips...

Exercise regularly. Exercises that improve strength, balance, and coordination are the most helpful in lowering the risk of fall-related injuries.

Ask a doctor or pharmacist to review both prescription and over-the-counter medications to monitor side effects and interactions. The way medications work in the body can change with age. Some medications or combinations of medications can contribute to drowsiness or dizziness, which may increase the risk of falling.

Have vision screenings at least once a year. The wrong prescription eyeglasses or health conditions, such as glaucoma or cataracts, limit vision and may increase the risk of falling.

Reduce hazards in the home that may lead to fall-related injuries.

- Keep floors clean and clear of clutter where persons walk.
- Maintain adequate lighting throughout the home, especially near stairways.
- Remove throw rugs or use non-skid throw rugs in the home, and use non-slip mats in the bathtub or shower.
- Install handrails on stairways and grab bars in bathrooms.
- Keep items needed for regular use in easy-to-reach places that don't require the use of a step stool.



Oklahoma State
Department of Health
Creating a State of Health

Tai Chi: Moving for Better Balance

A Fall Prevention Program

In 2009, the Pottawatomie County Health Department (PCHD) in Shawnee, Oklahoma and the Injury Prevention Service (IPS) assessed the most common injury risks in the City of Shawnee, and found that falls among older adults were a rising problem among persons 65 years of age and older. In an effort to help reduce fall-related injuries in this population, the PCHD and the IPS implemented one of the evidence-based fall prevention programs recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—*Tai Chi: Moving for Better Balance*.

“I haven’t been able to keep my balance since I was a child. Since going through this Tai Chi class, I have my balance back.” -Watonga Tai Chi Participant, age 75

The Oregon Research Institute’s *Tai-Chi: Moving for Better Balance* program has proven to improve balance, improve physical performance, and reduce falls by as much as 55%. In November of last year, 16 individuals were trained in Shawnee and surrounding communities as Tai Chi instructors to implement the Oregon Research Institute’s fall prevention program. Instructor candidates represented the following organizations: the PCHD, Okfuskee County Health Department, Logan County Health Department, Shawnee Senior Center, Indian Health Service, and Brookdale Senior Living.

Tai Chi classes are currently being conducted in Shawnee, Kingfisher, Watonga, and Guthrie. Participants in each area have provided positive feedback to the instructors about the classes and improvements they have noticed in their health.

Subsequent Tai Chi classes are expected to be implemented in additional Oklahoma communities this coming year. If you are interested in becoming a Tai Chi instructor to implement *Tai-Chi: Moving for Better Balance* in your community, please contact the IPS office by phone, (405) 271-3430.

Let’s work together to prevent older adult falls in Oklahoma!

For a complete list of effective community-based falls interventions from the CDC, please visit:

http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/images/CDCCompendium_030508-a.pdf.

“Tai Chi class made a great difference in my life! My balance has improved...now I can walk faster and steadier. Tai Chi has given me better balance and the confidence to do more kinds of exercise. Now I walk 2 miles, 3 times a week...”

-Shawnee Tai Chi Participant

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