

Aging Happens: All you need to know about falls

By Ellen Waldman

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If I told you this was going to be another column about falling and fall risks, would you stop right here and skip it? In spite of all the information that's out there on this topic, it's still a heavy hitter in our community. One in five falls results in serious injury and has an average cost of \$30,000 per person. In even larger numbers, 2.8 million people go to the emergency department each year due to falls.

If you're still reading, you'll be happy to know that today, Wednesday, Jan. 24, there is going to be a seminar on this topic. This is a last minute notice, but go if you can. Call the Ashland Family YMCA to register for this free event which is open to the whole community (541-482-9622). If they have a good turnout, it will be repeated and you'll be on a call list for a future event, even if you can't make it today. Today's event is from 11 a.m. to noon at the Y (540 YMCA Way). It's being co-sponsored and presented by the YMCA, Ashland Fire and Rescue (who've seen their share of falls), and Asante. It's for aging adults, their caregivers and family members. They will cover what creates fall risks and how to prevent them.

I spoke to Jane Sawall (who covers all three Asante's facilities in Ashland, Rogue Regional in Medford and Three Rivers in Grants Pass) about her role in this class. She is a clinical nurse specialist, board certified in community and public health. She has worked in southern Oregon since 1993, including management at Ashland Community Hospital, where fall prevention became a focus at the hospital in 2008.

She has seen her share of people coming into the hospital from falls. A component of her work includes monitoring inpatient falls, developing processes to prevent falls, and providing education to patients and staff on a system level. Her goal in partnering with this event is to increase awareness of the dangers of falls and methods to prevent injury related to falling.

I was also able to speak to Steven Boyersmith, the captain of Ashland Fire and Rescue. Naturally, the fire department has had its main focus on preventing fires, but they have moved on to include certain medical areas as well. He shared that there is now a great deal of info from science regarding falls which helps to identify the risks and how to deal with them more effectively. The guidelines for this information come from the state fire marshals' office. Last year, they also reached out to the community on this topic, and are going to continue doing so again this year.

One of the staff personal trainers at the Y, Gina Galardi, will be participating. I'm sure she'll be able to attest to how exercise is a very important component in preventing falls. Losing strength, balance and stability can be addressed with the right exercises. There is so much that is out of our hands as we age, but staying on our feet has some actual tools to support that worthy goal.

Even if you think you've got this all down, I encourage you to come hear it again. Or sign up for another session in the future. Encourage your friends to attend with you. But that's not enough. If you go, take what you'll learn and figure out which one or two steps you will enact right away, and which others you

will address down the line. You really don't want to miss the opportunity to "stay vertical," as a client of mine says as his way of closing out a phone call.

Here's how you know you will need this information: You take multiple medications; drink alcohol; have vision or hearing difficulties; cognitive difficulties or depression; wear the "wrong" shoes; lack exercise; live in a home that has walkway or porch hazards; poor lighting; throw rugs; clutter; lacks grab bars; have pets; or you've had a previous fall. Or you're simply aging. Any and all of these are considered to be risk factors. If you recognize yourself, or any friends or family members above, now's the time to get educated and stay upright.