

Aging Happens: Taking steps to avoid falls

By Ellen Waldman

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It's been said that falling is a game-changer for older adults. This is not meant to describe a change for the better, either. Here are some facts from a local organization, Age Friendly Innovators Inc. (AFI, www.agefriendlyinnovators.org; 541-261-2037). The average cost of an older adult falling is \$30,000 (according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, www.cdc.gov). One in three adults over 65 falls, and 35 percent of those falls occur in the bathroom.

Is it possible that most falls are preventable? There's going to be a workshop that will show that, in fact, they are a lot more preventable than many people think.

From 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 22, in the Carpenter Room at the Medford Library, 205 S. Central Ave., there will be a workshop entitled, "Please Don't Fall for Me!" If you are worried about a parent falling and breaking a hip, or about your own likelihood of an in-home fall, don't miss this free event.

The presenters are Sharon and Howard Johnson from AFI, whose focus on preventing falls has been well-received here locally. They are both certified aging-in-place specialists (CAPS), and also serve our community by offering no-cost, fall-risk assessments in the home. This event is sponsored by a grant from the Rogue Valley Council of Governments/Senior and Disability Services (www.rvcog.org).

This idea-packed workshop will demonstrate the small and larger things you can do to prevent falls and accompanying fractures. It will also discuss the higher risk of falling for older adults with mental health challenges (depression, anxiety disorders, and dementia), as well as those who've been prescribed multiple medications. In addition to this valuable information, there will also be refreshments and door prizes. Attendees will receive a product list of inexpensive items that can make their homes much safer from falls, and some of those products will be given out as door prizes.

Here's some important information from the Journal of Nursing Care, 2014, as cited by AFI: It's been determined that there are four main reasons that people fall: behavioral; environmental; biological; and socioeconomic.

Behavioral means factors like multiple medications; lack of exercise; and the wrong footwear. The home environment risks include walkways and porches in poor repair; slippery floors and throw rugs; and poor lighting. Biological factors include chronic illness; decline in physical, visual, and/or cognitive functioning; and age itself. The socioeconomic factors include inadequate housing; lack of social interaction; and limited access to health services. Let's not forget our "best friends" who have a way of getting underfoot. And once people fall, they seem to keep falling, too. Put them all together, and you have the recipe for a serious risk of falling in the home.

To address this growing problem, there are some simple solutions you might implement for yourself.

You can conduct your own in-home assessment based on this CDC website:

www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationsafety/falls/adultfalls.html. From this page, you can find the link for

several free publications on fall prevention and home assessments. One booklet is called “Check for Safety: A Home Fall Prevention Checklist for Older Adults.” It’s simple and easy to use on your own. It will advise you on immediate, near-term and longer-term modifications you can make at home.

A sample of simple modifications would be: declutter the living area of papers, throw rugs, and too much furniture; secure electrical cords and wires to the walls; have adequate lighting and night lights; and consider grab bars and mats in bath tubs. For yourself, have your eyes checked yearly; have all your medications reviewed by a pharmacist or your doctor; and think about taking a Tai-Chi class, which has been shown to prevent falls by increasing balance.

If learning some new information and making some modest changes to your home environment would prevent a fall, would you do this? Plan to attend this important event and find out how you can prevent this game-changer from happening to you.