

# Patty's PT Tips

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## Fall Prevention

Falls are not inevitable and there are lots of practical and simple steps that you can take to reduce your risk of falling.

Things which may contribute to a fall are:

- Previous falls/fractures-these decrease proprioception (the information you get back from your joint surfaces from specialized cells) This can include total joint replacements or joint surgeries such as a meniscus repair 30 years ago.
- Confusion/cognitive alertness/attention directed elsewhere beyond the task at hand.
- Diet/hydration-low blood sugar levels or insufficient fluid intake.
- Vestibular condition-“dizziness”-Meniere’s disease, inner ear dysfunction-needs medical consultation to resolve or improve.
- Poorly fitting footwear-inadequate support/decreased sensory information from feet.
- Decreased strength-particularly of dorsiflexors (the muscles that pick up your toes) and hip flexors.
- Fluctuation of spasticity that may occur suddenly i.e. “Charlie horse” in the calf muscles or hamstrings.
- Medication-especially medications that alter muscle tone (i.e. Baclofen) or alertness (i.e. gabapentin or sleep enhancing medications). The effect may vary based on when you took the medication prior to attempting the transfer or walking activity.
- Eyesight-i.e. prescription lens change, bifocals or hypersensitivity or sudden changes to available light.
- Hearing-if decreased may miss an auditory clue regarding oncoming hazard such as an unexpected arrival of a person or pet that is out of your field of vision.
- Hazards around the house like loose rugs, electrical cords, toys, pets-may include moved furniture or clutter on the floor.

- Poor mobility/flexibility and balance-particularly backward balance and flexibility at ankles.
- Changes to bracing (AFO) or assistive device (cane/walker/wheelchair).
- Lighting in the environment-keep sufficient lighting in a dark house.
- Quick changes of direction or speed of movement.
- Changing surfaces such as from pavement to gravel, wood floor to carpeted floor, changing from flat terrain to sloped terrain (ramp).
- Change of temperature in the environment or your core body temperature-particularly overheating which generally will make your legs/trunk weaker. This may happen somewhat suddenly or over a period of time.

### **Homework:**

Go over this list and highlight those things that you can change in your environment or your exercise program that could improve your situation.

Look at lifestyle modifications such as properly timed nutrition and hydration.

Consider assistive device changes or how you are utilizing the things that you already have.

Talk to your doctor if you think your medication regimen is influencing your function. They are not with you 24/7.

Ask for help if you cannot make these changes by yourself. The changes may help the people you live with too! (i.e. better lighting)

Practice balance skills in a safe environment or with supervision so you can get appropriate feedback.

Don't live with fear-that can impair your balance and function too!