

PREVENTING FALLS IN OLDER ADULTS



Falls Impact Thousands of Lives

A Personal Story

“I was traveling in Israel when it happened,” said Ruth Leibowitz. “I sustained a C2 fracture and had to wear a neck brace for three months.” Ruth experienced the major fall in 2009 after suffering minor injuries from a few falls. An active, independent 86-year-old woman, who lives alone, now knows firsthand the danger of falls for older adults.

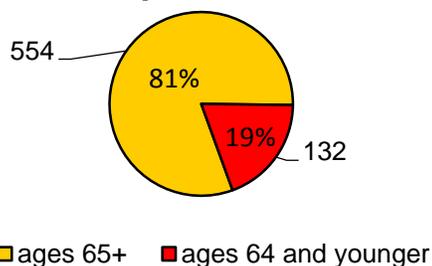


The neck brace made life difficult and inconvenient for Ruth. “I couldn’t drive. I had to rely on my daughter to drive me to appointments and take me shopping,” she said. The only thing I could do by myself was walk to a nearby store for small items. I felt so helpless.”

Recovery was a long and difficult process. “I had to have physical therapy after my neck brace was removed. I had to learn how to move around again and do things for myself.” The experiences that resulted from her fall have changed Ruth’s outlook. “I used to do things quickly. Now I move slower and I am more careful,” she said. “I still have to do my exercises to keep myself strong,” Ruth said. “Now I exercise four times a week at a gym. I use a recumbent bicycle, weight machines and a treadmill. I don’t walk outside as much because I’m afraid I might trip over uneven sidewalks and curbs. And I definitely don’t want to fall again!”

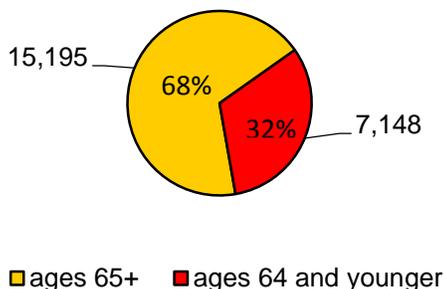
The Burden

Table 1: Fall-Related Deaths in Maryland, 2013



- Of the 686 fall-related **deaths** reported in 2013 in Maryland, **554** (80.8%) were adults 65 years and older.¹ See Table 1.
- In 2013, there were 128,677 fall-related **emergency department visits** across all age groups of which **30,243** (24%) were among adults aged 65 years and older (excludes persons with unknown age).²
- In 2013, there were 22,343 fall-related **hospitalizations** across all age groups of which **15,195** (68%) hospitalizations were among adults aged 65 years and older (excludes persons with unknown age).² See Table 2.

Table 2: Fall-Related Hospitalizations in Maryland for Ages 65+, 2013



Falls are costly

- In 2013, among adults aged 65 years and older, fall-related hospital admissions costs were \$244,991,347.²
- In 2013, among adults aged 65 years and older, fall-related emergency department visit charges* were \$17,881,472.47.²

*Note: The method to determine ED visit charges was updated with the 2011 HSCRC data; therefore 2011+ charges cannot be compared to charges from previous years.

How can older adults prevent falls:³

- √ Exercise regularly
- √ Check vision
- √ Review medication side effects
- √ Make their homes safer

What you can do in your community to prevent falls.

- Join the statewide injury prevention coalition “Partnership for a Safer Maryland” to stay updated on the issue.
- Familiarize yourself with available resources by visiting www.safermaryland.org.
- Promote awareness of injuries related to falls in your community and evidence-based intervention programs.
- Build a local group to prevent falls.

REFERENCES

1. Unpublished data retrieved by the Maryland Core VIPP Program from the mortality file provided by the Maryland Vital Statistics Administration, July 2015.
2. Unpublished data retrieved by the Maryland Core VIPP Program from the Health Services Cost Review Commission (HSCRC) datasets, July 2015.
3. CDC website: <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/adultfalls.html>.

The Partnership supports activities to prevent falls among older adults. Visit our website (www.safermaryland.org) for a comprehensive resource list of available publications, evidence-based fall prevention programs, and various actions taken by organizations on fall prevention in Maryland.

For more information, contact the state Fall Prevention Advisory Group lead Jade Leung, Center for Injury and Sexual Assault Prevention, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) at 410-767-2919 or jade.leung@maryland.gov. Also visit DHMH’s website: http://phpa.dhmh.maryland.gov/ohpetup/SitePages/eip_falls.aspx for more resources.