Introducing the Falls Prevention Conversation Guide for Caregivers

- Chelsea Gilchrist, MGS, National Council on Aging
- Mike Wittke, MPA, National Alliance for Caregiving
- Kathleen Cameron, MPH, National Council on Aging
- Alice Bell, PT, DPT, American Physical Therapy Association
- Michelle Fritsch, Pharm.D., BCGP, BCACP
- Jacqueline Wilson, MS, OTR/L, Towson University

November 28, 2017
Caregivers play an important role in preventing falls among older adults, and are often at risk themselves.

Webinar Objectives:
• Learn about the new *Falls Prevention Conversation Guide for Caregivers*.
• Participate in a question and answer session with a pharmacist, an occupational therapist, and a physical therapist about their collaborative roles in preventing falls and fall-related injuries among older adults.
About the Alliance

- Non-profit coalition of over 50 national organizations focused on family caregiving issues
- Established in 1996 to support family caregivers and the professionals who work with them
- NAC Activities:
  - Conduct research and policy analysis;
  - Develop national programs;
  - Strengthen state and local coalitions;
  - Increase public awareness;
  - International work and awareness.
About the National Council on Aging (NCOA)

Our Mission:
Improve the lives of millions of older adults, especially those who are struggling

Our Social Impact Goal:
Improve the health and economic security of 10 million older adults by 2020
Funded by the Administration for Community Living/ Administration on Aging
Increase public awareness about falls prevention
Serve as the national clearinghouse for tools and resources
Support and stimulate evidence-based programs and strategies

www.ncoa.org/healthy-aging/falls-prevention/
Why is Falls Prevention Important?

- Falls are the leading cause of fatal and non-fatal injuries for older Americans.
- Falls result in injuries, such as hip fractures, broken bones, and head injuries.
- Falls are costly—the average hospital cost for a fall injury is over $30,000.
- After a fall, many older adults develop a fear of falling and, as a result, limit their activities and social engagements.
- After a care recipient’s first fall, caregivers report a significant increase in caregiver burden, fear of falling, and depression.
Why is this Guide Important for Caregivers?

- Caregivers need options to increase physical fitness
- Caregivers need more information
- Caregivers want to worry less and keep their loved one safe
- Care recipients are likely to be at-risk for fall
- Caregivers need guidance on how to take action to prevent falls
Falls Prevention Conversation Guide for Caregivers

https://www.ncoa.org/resources/falls-prevention-conversation-guide-caregivers/
The Falls Prevention Conversation Guide for Caregivers

- Falls Prevention Basics
- Step 1: Assess your risk and your care recipient's risk for a fall
- Step 2: Have a conversation about falls prevention with supportive family, friends, and community members
- Step 3: Develop a falls prevention action plan
Falls Prevention Basics

**Physical risk factors:** Changes in your body that increase your risk for a fall
- Muscle weakness, balance, and gait problems
- Vision
- Medication use
- Chronic conditions

**Behavioral risk factors:** Things we do or don’t do that increase our fall risk

**Environmental risk factors:** Hazards in our home or community

Image courtesy of Michael Heiss at flicker.com
Step 1: Fall Risk Assessment

Assess your risk and your care recipient’s risk for a fall.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CIRCLE YES OR NO FOR EACH STATEMENT BELOW</th>
<th>WHY IT MATTERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes (2) No (0) I have fallen in the past year.</td>
<td>People who have fallen once are likely to fall again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (2) No (0) I can, or have been advised to use, a cane or walker to get around safely.</td>
<td>People who have been advised to use a cane or walker may already be more likely to fall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (1) No (0) Sometimes I feel unsteady when I am walking.</td>
<td>Unsteadiness or needing support while walking are signs of poor balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (1) No (0) I steady myself by holding onto furniture when walking at home.</td>
<td>This is also a sign of poor balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (1) No (0) I am worried about falling.</td>
<td>People who are worried about falling are more likely to fall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (1) No (0) I need to push with my hands to stand up from a chair.</td>
<td>This is a sign of weak leg muscles, a major reason for falling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (1) No (0) I have trouble stepping up onto a curb.</td>
<td>This is also a sign of weak leg muscles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (1) No (0) I often have to rush to the toilet.</td>
<td>Rushing to the bathroom, especially at night, increases your chance of falling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (1) No (0) I have lost some feeling in my feet.</td>
<td>Numbness in your feet can cause stumbles and lead to falls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (1) No (0) I take medicine that sometimes makes me feel light-headed or more tired than usual.</td>
<td>Side effects from medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (1) No (0) I take medicine to help me sleep or improve my mood.</td>
<td>These medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (1) No (0) I often feel sad or depressed.</td>
<td>Symptoms of depression, such as not feeling well or slowed down, are linked to falls.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total _____  Add up the number of points for each Yes answer. If you scored 4 points or more, you may be at risk of falling.
Step 2: Have a Conversation about Falls Prevention

- Educate yourself prior to the conversation
- Be mindful of how you describe the changes you have noticed that pose a risk for falling
- Be mindful of your tone and body language, and be positive
- Recognize that this conversation may need to happen more than once
- Pair a doctor’s visit with an enjoyable activity
- Be open to changing your strategy
Step 3: Develop a Falls Prevention Action Plan

- Enlist support in taking steps to stay safe
- Discuss current health conditions
- Note when the last eye checkup was
- Notice if the person you are caring for is holding onto furniture when walking, or if there is difficulty arising from a chair
Step 3 (Continued): Develop a Falls Prevention Action Plan

- Talk about medications
- Do a walk-through safety assessment of the home
- Find an appropriate community-based falls prevention program

6. Do a walk-through safety assessment of the home.
   Most falls happen at home. There are many simple and inexpensive ways to make a home safer. For professional assistance, consult an occupational therapist. Here are some examples:
   - **LIGHTING:** Increase lighting throughout the house, especially at the top and bottom of stairs. Ensure that lighting is readily available when getting up in the middle of the night.
   - **STAIRS:** Make sure there are two secure rails on all stairs.
   - **BATHROOMS:** Install grab bars in the tub/shower and near the toilet. Make sure they're installed where your loved one would actually use them. For even greater safety, consider using a shower chair and hand-held shower.
   - **FLOORS:** Keep floors clutter free. Remove small throw rugs or use double-sided tape to keep the rugs from slipping.

Friend or family who will help: ____________________________
Additional Resources

- National Council on Aging, National Falls Prevention Resource Center
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Go4Life
- AARP
- American Occupational Therapy Association
- American Physical Therapy Association
Question & Answer Session

*Please type your questions into the chat box.*

- Alice Bell, Physical Therapist
- Michelle Fritsch, Pharmacist
- Jacqueline Wilson, Occupational Therapist
Webinar 1: Caregivers as Partners and Recipients of Falls Prevention Efforts: The Role of State Coalitions

Caregivers play an important role in preventing falls among older adults, and are often at risk themselves. The National Council on Aging (NCOA) partnered with the National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC) to connect professionals in aging and caregiving to better educate caregivers across the country about falls risk factors and prevention strategies. Learn about the National Network of Caregiving Coalitions and State Falls Prevention Coalitions. This webinar will also highlight collaborations between caregiving and fall prevention coalitions in two states, Montana and Washington.

Webinar 2: Take Control of Your Health: You Have the Power to Prevent a Fall!

Falls are the leading cause of fatal and non-fatal injuries for older Americans. Falls are costly—in dollars and in quality of life. The good news is that falling is not a normal part of aging. Join this webinar to learn steps you can take to prevent a fall. This event will also highlight helpful resources from the National Council on Aging’s National Falls Prevention Resource Center.
Contact Us

Chelsea Gilchrist, MGS
Senior Program Manager, National Council on Aging
chelsea.gilchrist@ncoa.org

Mike Wittke, BSW, MPA
Director of Advocacy, National Alliance for Caregiving
mike@caregiving.org
It Takes a Village

“It takes a village of stakeholders working together to prevent falls and reduce falls risk, tasks that no one stakeholder can accomplish alone”