

Medical Risk Factors and Prevention of Falls and Fractures

People with developmental disabilities generally have a high risk for falls and resulting fractures. Some of the reasons for this are secondary conditions such as cerebral palsy, seizure disorders, osteoporosis and the side effects of certain medications such as diuretics, strong pain medication, anti-psychotics and hypnotics. Falls may be preventable and efforts toward prevention activities may result in decreased risk for persons with developmental disabilities. Other articles on this web site may be consulted for prevention activities from an environmental or personal point of view.

Medical Risk Factors for Falls

- Cardiac arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat) and blood pressure fluctuation
- Cancer that effects the bones
- Depression, Alzheimer's disease and senility
- Arthritis, hip weakness or imbalance
- Neurological conditions, strokes, Parkinson's disease
- Urinary and bladder problems
- Vision or hearing loss
- Side effects of medications for pain and sleep
- Osteoporosis
- Cerebral palsy
- Physical inactivity
- Epilepsy
- Vertigo, temporary muscle paralysis
- Decreased strength and coordination

Reducing Medical Risks for Falls

- Assure that consumers at risk get an annual physical and vision exam. Pay particular attention to cardiac and blood pressure evaluations.
- Provide education to consumers, providers and families about the importance of a diet with adequate calcium and vitamin D intake.
- Recommend and help consumers select appropriate exercise programs for agility, strength, balance and coordination.
- Whenever a consumer sees a physician, a complete list of medications (including non-prescription) should be provided. It is important to know whether any currently prescribed medications might lead to an increased risk of falls.
- Side effects of medications should be known to the consumer and to those who support or are in close contact with the consumer. This should include awareness of the increased potential for falls while taking certain medications.
- Schedule bone scans for consumers at risk for osteoporosis.
- Assure that adaptive equipment is safe and in good repair.
- Contact a physician if there is a change in the frequency or type of seizures.