

News Column Week of 1/14/19

Deanna Turner, Extension Agent: Family & Consumer Sciences, Aging Programs

River Valley Extension District

1/10/19

## **Preventing Falls in Winter**

Have you ever seen a picture of a polar bear slipping on the ice? A person's risk for falling increases dramatically during the winter months. Among older adults, falls are the leading cause of fatal injury and non-fatal traumas. Every 19 minutes an older adult dies from a fall. Every fall often has a substantial financial toll. Be safe this winter by following these tips for preventing slips, trips, and falls.

**Shoes, Shoes, Shoes!** Regardless of the weather, a person should always strive to wear proper footwear. The last time I wore flip flops I slipped and fell on wet steps and learned my lesson to leave those in the closet. Your shoes should support your feet appropriately, have a firm sole, and have good traction. Traction is especially important during the winter months, as you never know when you will encounter a frozen puddle, snow, or slush. Investing in a safe pair of shoes can save you thousands of dollars in medical expenses that may result from a fall.

**Do You See What I See?** Having your vision regularly assessed is a crucial component of fall prevention. Age-related eye diseases, such as glaucoma and cataracts, can affect your ability to see clearly. Having an untreated condition can affect your ability to walk safely, especially on slippery surfaces. Eye diseases are not the only culprit, though. Of course, you always want to make sure you are seeing as clearly as possible. When was the last time you had your eyes checked? If it's been longer than 12 months, it's time to see the eye doctor.

**Review your Medications.** Have you ever read the warning labels on your medicine bottle? Perhaps you should! One of the more common side effects of medications is dizziness or lightheadedness. These side effects can also increase your risk of experiencing a fall. If you experience any of these symptoms, talk to your doctor. There may be another medication with the same benefits you can try that may not give you the same negative effects.

**How's your Health?** Did you know, inner-ear disorders can make you susceptible to falls? What about low blood pressure or even arthritis? Having regular check-ups – at least once every 12 months – is an important part of fall prevention. Talk to your doctor about what might increase your risk of falls, and discuss ways to compensate for or address those issues.

**Keep on Moving!** Research shows older adults who regularly engage in exercise of all kinds are less likely to experience a fall. Try walking around the block, practicing Tai Chi or Yoga, or even balancing on one foot (with a sturdy wall or chair nearby to catch yourself, if you become unstable). Any amount of exercise is beneficial for your overall health!

K-State Research & Extension has the Walk Kansas program coming up March 17- May 11. Watch for details on how to participate in this program. Physical activity videos are available on the website at: <https://www.walkkansas.org>. Also, Stay Strong, Stay Healthy and Senior Fitness classes will be taught in the River Valley District. Another resource from the Go4Life campaign-National Institute on Aging at NIH has exercise videos available at <https://go4life.nia.nih.gov/>.

Watch your step as you enjoy each day in 2019!