

CLINICAL SPOTLIGHT: FALL PREVENTION

Falls among adults aged 65 and older are common, costly, and preventable. They are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries among older adults; one out of five falls causes a serious injury such as broken bones or a head injury.

As a healthcare professional, you are already aware that falls are a serious threat to the health and well-being of your older patients. You play an important role in caring for older adults, and you can help reduce these devastating injuries.

Falling is not a part of normal aging. To support their patients, Physical Therapists play an integral role in assessing risk factors and developing a plan to help individuals remain as independent as possible by:

- Designing an individualized plan to address fall-prevention needs
- Educating you about the medical risk factors associated with falls
- Providing patients with appropriate exercises and balance training
- Working with other health care professionals to address any underlying medical conditions that could increase fall risk

Did You Know? Approximately 54 million Americans have osteoporosis and low bone mass, placing them at increased risk for osteoporosis. Studies suggest that approximately one in two women and one in four men age 50 and older will break a bone due to osteoporosis.

Osteoporosis Facts:

- On average, osteoporosis is responsible for two million broken bones and \$19 billion in related costs every year.
- By 2025, experts predict that osteoporosis will be responsible for approximately three million fractures and \$25.3 billion in costs annually.
- Women are twice as likely to have osteoporosis as men.
- Long-term high-dose glucocorticoid use increases the risk of hip and vertebral fracture.
- Fracture incidence increases as bone mineral density decreases.
- A history of falls in the past year preceded 95% of hip fractures and 85% of all fractures in older adults.

(source: [National Osteoporosis Foundation](#))



Each year, 3 million older people are treated in emergency departments for fall injuries. Over 800,000 patients a year are hospitalized because of a fall injury, most often because of a head injury or hip fracture. For the years 2007 to 2016, fall death rates increased by 30%. (source: CDC)

Hip Fracture = Life-Altering Event

Research shows that hip fractures are the most serious osteoporotic fracture. In fact, 90% of all hip fractures in people 65 years and older result from a ground-level fall.

- An estimated 24% of hip fracture patients over age 50 die in the year following a fracture.
- Fewer than half of hospitalized hip fracture patients recover their pre-fracture competence in activities of daily living.
- Only one-fourth of patients regain previous levels of social functioning.
- At 6 months after a fracture, just 15% of hip fracture patients can walk across a room unaided.
- 25% of those who were ambulatory before a hip fracture require long-term care afterward.



Therapy: Supporting the Path to Recovery

People recovering from a hip fracture are at high risk for muscle weakness, fear of falling, and limitations in mobility, self-care, and participation that last for months after surgery.

Physical Therapists contribute to the interprofessional management of older adults with hip fractures, including screening for, identifying, and participating in the management of common co-occurring conditions.

Following a hip fracture, physical therapy and exercise can improve transfers (e.g., from bed to chair), gait, leg strength, flexibility, and balance. Most hip fracture patients benefit from a full-body exercise program tailored to their initial condition with guided progression as strength returns.

Physical Therapists and Occupational Therapists work with hip fracture patients for the proper and safe use of assistive devices such as canes and walkers and, if safe, assist the patient in progressing from walkers to canes to unaided walking.

ATS Physical Therapists and Occupational Therapists are integral members of the Interdisciplinary Team to support patients recovering from a fracture. [Contact us](#) to learn more.

Informative Articles and Resources:

- [Algorithm for Fall Risk Screening, Assessment, and Intervention – CDC](#)
- [Bone Source - Clinical Guidelines](#)
- [Healthcare Professionals Toolkit - National Osteoporosis Foundation](#)
- [Interventions for preventing falls in older people living in the community](#)
- [Physical Therapy Management of Older Adults With Hip Fracture - Journal of Orthopaedic & Sports Physical Therapy](#)
- [Preventing Falls in Older Patients: Provider Pocket Guide – CDC](#)
- [STEADI Initiative for Health Care Providers – CDC](#)

Leadership Recommendations

- The Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) should work closely together to develop a person-centered approach to fall risk assessment and care planning to minimize the risk of falls for the patients they serve.
- Provide team members with appropriate training and resources to support competencies regarding fall prevention.
- Encourage patients to participate in their plan of care that is customized to their specific needs and goals.
- For patients recovering from hip fracture repair, the IDT should identify goals for recovery of function, which may include independent basic mobility, achieving prior level of function, return to pre-fracture residence, and activities to support long-term well-being. Goals should be reviewed and revised throughout the continuum of care.
- Provide education to patients and families regarding the importance of lifestyle changes and monitoring risk factors to help prevent falls and fractures.

The Importance of Exercise to Avoid Fractures

ATS Physical Therapists customize exercise programs to include balance, strength and endurance training that can significantly reduce the risk of falls and associated fractures. Studies have shown that even frail elderly patients can benefit.

Weight-bearing exercise increases bone density at the spine and hip. Benefits can also be obtained with lower-impact, moderate-intensity exercise once or twice a week. Exercise does not have to be strenuous to be effective in preventing falls. One large clinical study found that simply walking regularly reduced hip fracture by 30 percent. Also, studies indicate that patients benefit most when aerobic exercise is accompanied by balance training and muscle strengthening exercises focused on building lower extremity and postural muscles.

Exercises that strengthen the lower extremities reduce the risk of falling and may prevent consequent fractures. Non-impact balance and posture exercises protect the spine against injury in daily activities and reduce the risk of falls. Some of these exercises include:

- Lifting weights using back-safe position and technique
- Pulling elastic exercise bands
- Using weight machines
- Lifting one's own body weight, such as one-foot stands and toe raises
- Balance exercises that strengthen legs and challenge balance, such as Tai Chi or slow/controlled dancing
- Posture exercises that strengthen back extensor muscles
- Functional exercises focused on safely performing everyday activities, such as climbing stairs

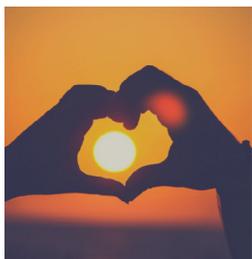
[Contact us](#) to discuss how we can support your fall prevention goals.



Services Spotlight: Physical Therapy Services

ATS provides Physical Therapy services to patients in all care settings, including skilled nursing, assisted/independent living, outpatient and home health. Working with an Interdisciplinary Team, we combine excellent therapeutic programming with state-of-the-art equipment for a perfect rehabilitative combination.

[Learn more about our Therapy Services>](#)



Reflections from the ATS Team

“While I’ve always known that PTs play an important role in patients’ lives, what I have come to realize is that our place in their hearts and lives is bigger than that. I am lucky enough to get to be a part of this every day with ATS!!”

Advanced Therapy Solutions exists to inspire, encourage, and motivate patients to excellence in therapy. Every patient is unique to us. Therefore, each one is treated with care, support, and dignity as they strive to achieve their daily therapy goals. We pride ourselves on treating others as they want to be treated, for this is our ultimate measure of the quality of care in every respect.

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