

September 2009

A Fall Happens Right Under Your Feet

By: Erin Ulibarri, MPH

One fall can drastically change a person's life. Even though falls happen to 1 in 3 older adults each year, they are not inevitable or a natural part of the aging process. There are many things a person can do to remain active, independent, and fall-free.

September 20-27, 2009 is *Fall Prevention Awareness Week*. The Down with Falls Coalition, a collaboration of health professionals, government agencies, and community organizations, will be out in the community during the week presenting fall prevention information at various locations.

Common reasons for falling include: 1) having problems walking or moving around; 2) taking four or more medications; 3) having foot problems and wearing unsafe footwear; 4) muscle weakness; and 5) tripping hazards in and around your home.

Environment modification, which includes both changes to indoor environments, such as the home, and outdoor environment is a fall prevention strategy. How "walkable" is your neighborhood? When walking outside, take these precautions to lower your chances of having a fall:

- Walk with a friend so you can both look for trip hazards
- Watch for sidewalk cracks, tree roots, holes, and elevation changes
- Be aware that trees drop leaves, seed pods, blossoms, and other debris
- Slow down when carrying bulky items
- Hold the hand rails when using stairs
- Be cautious in parking lots and watch for curbs and concrete wheel chocks/ parking stops
- Watch for traffic and use curb cuts and respite islands when crossing the street

Call the County of Orange Office on Aging's Information Specialists at **1-800-510-2020** or **1-714-567-7500** to request a fall prevention packet (home safety checklists, medication charts, brochures) and learn about local resources or the Down with Falls Coalition. The Office on Aging Information and Assistance Specialists also have information on all programs and services for older adults in Orange County, including in-home assistance, transportation, caregiver support, counseling, residential facilities, and meal programs.