Five things you can do today to help prevent falls
By: Ron Blehm, PA-DRECC Physical Therapist

Falls are one of the leading causes of injury in adults over 50 years old. Compound that with a chronic illness such as Parkinson's and the risk for suffering an injurious fall skyrockets. When you suffer an injury your body has to spend valuable resources, healing resources, that are no longer available to keep you active. For someone who has difficulty getting around as easily as they would like, facing the prospect of being less active for weeks or months could very likely mean the end of walking, the end of your independence, or even admittance into a nursing home. Here are five things you might try, starting today, to keep yourself safer.

Exercise: One of the greatest predictors of falls is falls. Once you start falling down you are more likely to fall down again. I believe that the best defense is a good defense so start exercising and being more active now, today, even if you've never fallen in your life. What's more, exercising helps to keep you stronger and healthier and who doesn't need that?

Balance Drills: This ties in closely with the thought above. I tell my patients that even the professional athletes making millions of dollars have to practice little drills – like shooting free-throws. So, why shouldn't you practice little skills like balancing? Stand just next to your bed (bed behind you) and try to lean back without falling. If you can lean and then recover you are learning how to recover from falling backwards! Hold onto the kitchen counter or walker and do several sideways or backwards single-leg kicks - Do this with music to add some fun.

Tai Chi or Aquatics: Research is showing that Tai Chi or group exercises are not just good for the body but good for the mind too. Group exercise keeps Parkinson's Disease from being quite so isolating and gets you out of the house. I don’t know of anyone who has fallen while in the water so aquatics can be a safe exercise option too.

Assistive Devices: Rehabilitation may also offer you an assistive device such as a cane or walker. These can be very effective in helping to improve your ability to walk and more importantly, they can drastically reduce your risk for falling. The tough thing about these devices is that they can't help that much if you do not use them, so leaving the cane in the car won't keep you from falling in the home.

Think about it: If you are sitting in the passenger’s seat of a car and you need to get out of the car, which leg goes out first? Answer, not the left one! Slow down, look at your surroundings and take some time to think about your next move. Put the outside leg out first…get both feet out before standing…get your feet (and your walker) under you and get your

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Patient Poem

This Poem was written by a Parkinson’s Disease Patient by the name of Mariko Ikeda. Mariko wrote the poem when commuting by bus and was inspired by watching people get on and off.

It is not sympathy, Rather “applause” I would send them. To those who ride the bus with a cane Or on a wheel chair. I see the beauty of the strength on every step, every push they make. THEY ARE WINNING!!!

Home Improvement

One way to prevent falls is to make your house a safer place for you to live. Here are some helpful hints on how to achieve a safer living environment.

Remove things that you could tip over:
- Keep your walkways clear
- Remove any extra clutter
- Remove things that you can trip on such as throw rugs, boxes, piles of things, or cords.
- Don’t keep items on your stairs
- Clean up any spills right away.
- Keep snow and ice off of entrances and sidewalks

Fix that which is broken:
- Tack rugs and glue vinyl flooring so that it lays flat
- Make sure that carpet is firmly attached to the stairs.
- Repair or discard wobbly step stools.
- Repair loose boards on porches or damaged stairs
- Have rough edges, holes, or large cracks in your sidewalks or driveway repaired.

Light it up:
- Add nightlights to halls, bedrooms, and bathrooms
- Put light switches at both the bottom and top of stairs as well as on both ends of hallways.
- Make sure that every room has the proper amount of lighting
- Make sure that there are lights near outside doors and stairs
- Keep a lamp or a light switch that you can easily reach without getting out of bed.

Add safety devices:
- Add handrails to both sides of stairs.
- Buy a raised toilet seat
- Add grab bars near the toilet and in the shower
- Use bath mats with suction cups, or use non-slip adhesive strips in the shower or tub.
- Get grabbers to help you reach things.
- Buy a bench or stool to sit on in the shower.
- Paint outside stairs with a mixture of sand and paint for better traction.

How to Prepare and What to Do if You Do Fall

There are several things you can do to prepare for a fall. Have someone check on you daily, Keep a list of emergency numbers near the phone, and always have a way to call for help whether it be a cell phone or talk to your doctor about getting a home monitoring service. If you do start to fall, try to relax your body. This will reduce the impact off the fall. Try your best to stay calm. Press your monitor button if you have a home monitoring service or call for help using a cell phone. Make sure that you check with your healthcare provider for any injuries.
You may be eligible to participate in the study if you meet all of the following criteria.

- Have a definite diagnosis of PD
- On a stable dose of anti-depressant medication
- Between 18-85 years of age

This is a three-month pilot study in which 60 participants with either PD or MS will be randomly assigned to receive either fish oil capsules (which have high amounts of omega-3 fatty acids) or placebo capsules. The study requires 5 visits to OHSU. The research study will pay for all costs associated with the participation in this study. You will be responsible for any expenses that have to do with other aspects of your participation such as childcare and transportation. If you meet the eligibility requirements described above and are interested in participating in this study please call Dr. Lynne Shinto at (503) 494-5035.
# Calendar of Events
Upcoming classes, support groups, and other events related to movement disorders

## Portland Patient Education Talks
All talks listed will be held in the Portland VA Auditorium from 10:00 – 11:00 unless otherwise noted. Please arrive early for parking. For more information call 503-721-1091.

**Friday, May 18, 2007: Fatigue in Parkinson’s Disease**
Gordon Campbell, ANP

**Friday, July 27, 2007: Update on Impact and Treatment of Falls in Parkinson’s Disease**
Jeff Kraakevik, MD and Ron Blehm, BS in PT

## Seattle Patient Education Talks
All talks listed will be held at the Seattle VA (Building 1, Room 240) from 1:30 PM – 3:30 PM. For More information call 206-277-4560.

**Tuesday, June 19, 2007: Medications in PD**
Ali Samii, MD

## Parkinson’s Center of Oregon (PCO) 2006-2007 Annual Events:

- **Newly Diagnosed Educational Session**: Occurs every other month. For more information call 503-494-9054.

## Want to Contribute?
This newsletter is yours, and we think you should be involved. If you have any art, poems, stories, or articles you would like to share with other Parkinson’s patients, please send them to the address listed below or e-mail them to nwpadrecc@va.gov with newsletter submission as the subject line.

### Portland VA Medical Center
Attention: Susan O’Connor
P3-PADRECC
3710 SW US Veterans Hospital Rd.
Portland, OR 97239

To receive the Parkinsonian by e-mail please forward a request to nwpadrecc@med.va.gov. Call 503-721-1091 to be removed from our mailing list.

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**Department of Veteran Affairs**

**Portland VA Medical Center**
P3-PADRECC
3710 SW US Veterans Hospital Rd.
Portland, OR 97239
Phone: (503) 721-1091

**Seattle VA Puget Sound Health Care System**
Neurology 127
1660 S. Columbian Way
Seattle, WA 98108
Phone: (206) 764-2021

nwpadrecc@va.gov