

Preventing Falls with Exercise

As people age, the risk of falls and fall-related injuries increases. In fact, one in four Americans over the age of 65 falls each year. And the consequences of falls in older adults can be dire – falls are the number one cause of fractures and are the second leading cause of unintentional injury and death worldwide.

Improving and maintaining strength and balance are key to reducing the risk of falls. Exercises that target the core and stabilizing muscles are especially effective at increasing range of motion and enhancing stability, which can help combat the unsteadiness many seniors experience. The good news is that these exercises are low impact and can be adapted according to residents' mobility and overall health.

Here are some types of exercise your community may want to consider offering to help seniors avoid falls.

Yoga

Yoga's focus on balance and flexibility makes it an ideal exercise for seniors as well as an effective way to prevent falls. The movements are low impact and can be adapted to all abilities. In addition to the physical benefits, yoga can help reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, all of which can contribute to fall risk. It can also improve focus and concentration, which can help seniors navigate their environment and avoid hazards.



Tai Chi

According to the National Council on Aging, Tai Chi is one of the most effective exercises for preventing falls. Its fluid motions are especially helpful for seniors with arthritis, a major fall contributor, by helping to improve flexibility and strength. Seniors who practice Tai Chi not only improve their balance and mobility, but also report having less fear of falling. Like yoga, Tai Chi can be adapted to individual abilities and can positively affect mental health as well as physical.

Pilates

Another exercise that can help improve mobility and balance is Pilates. It's focus on the core helps improve stability and muscle control while building strength and improving flexibility. An added benefit is that it's been shown to help relieve tension in the shoulders, back and legs, which can prevent muscle aches and improve posture.

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In addition to offering group classes in your community, encourage seniors to do exercises on their own as they go about their daily lives. Some examples of simple movements that can help improve strength and balance include:

- Balancing on one foot
- Sitting and standing without using hands
- Standing on tip toes
- Leg extensions while seated
- Walking
- Gentle stretching

While many risk factors for falls, like vision impairment, and certain medications, can't be avoided, regular exercise can help seniors stay mobile, navigate their environments more safely, and eliminate the fear that may hold them back from participating in social activities.