

Day 6: Mental Health

Mental Health

- The status of our mental health can influence our risk of having a fall. Mental health can include anxiety, depression, substance abuse (medication or alcohol), cognitive impairments (e.g., dementia) and medication used to treat mental health concerns.
- Mental health concerns often result in isolation and inactivity, which are both risk factors for a fall. When we are feeling anti-social or upset, we are not likely to feel motivated enough to join a group exercise class, go for a morning walk, or join a social card game. This lack of activity can result in the loss of muscle and bone mass, which makes falling more prevalent and severe.
- Treatment for mental health concerns can include medication, therapy, learning coping skills and family/community support. The most common form of treatment is medication, however, sometimes these medications yield undesirable side effects (e.g., poor balance, lack of motivation, blood pressure issues, dizziness, vision problems, etc.). Medication use is potentially the most modifiable risk factor for falls. This means that we can reduce our risk of falling by simply visiting a pharmacist and following their directions properly.
- Avoid excessive use of alcohol. Substance abuse is a risk factor for a fall.

What can we do about our mental health?

- Talk to your healthcare team and keep them updated on your mental health
- Consider visiting a social worker if you have concerns about your mental health
- Avoid taking more medication than what is prescribed and/or necessary
- Visit your pharmacist frequently to ensure that you are taking the proper medications and the correct dose. Ask the pharmacist to review your medications and to look for any complications or interactions (e.g., alcohol)
- Exercise! Physical activity helps us feel good, gets us out of our sluggish routines, and helps us regain our social networks



Day 6: Sleep Disturbance

Sleep Disturbances

- Sleep is a basic necessity in life at all ages
- When we are continuously deprived of sleep, other activities in our day suffer
- Interestingly, lack of sleep was the most frequently self-reported risk factor for falling
- When we do not get a good night's sleep, we often feel drowsy, sleepy and unmotivated. This leads us to forgo our daily activities
- This reduced physical activity (after many sleep-less nights and many days not exercising) can lead to a fall, or an injury from a fall
- The good news is that some steps can be taken to promote a good night's sleep!

What can we do about sleep disturbances?

- Having a regular and consistent schedule of bedtimes and wakeup times, even on weekends or holidays can help us get into a “regular sleep schedule” which can promote better sleep
- Physical activity, performed in the morning or early afternoon can help you sleep better at night. Note: Avoid strenuous exercise within 4 hours of bedtime
- Even if you are too tired to exercise, try to get a few minutes of physical activity every day. Exercise will help you sleep at night, so put effort into doing some exercise as often as possible
- Create a nice, quiet and relaxing sleeping area (try to reduce excess noise, or use white noise, turn off lights, listen to relaxing music or run a hot bath before bed)
- Getting exposure to sun light during the day and darkness during the night can help the body get into a regular sleep rhythm
- Avoid heavy meals, large amounts of liquid, cigarettes, alcohol and caffeine 3 or 4 hours before bedtime
- Speak to your doctor or a sleep specialist if you are having serious problems with your sleep habits

