

Injury and illness are of concern to us all. Dr. Gary Kronick answers some questions about how we can keep ourselves safe and healthy. Dr. Kronick is Board Certified in Internal Medicine and is a partner in Community Care Physicians Internal Medicine group located in the Capital Region Health Park in Latham, NY. (518-783-3110)

*QUESTION: So many older adults having a serious injury caused by a fall, is there any way to prevent this?*

ANSWER: Falls are not just a result of getting older. The good news is that with a bit of careful planning many falls can be prevented. Some key tools for preventing falls include regular exercise, inspecting your home to make sure appropriate safety precautions are in place, making sure you're fully alert when out of bed and finally, making sure you receive regular check-ups, including an eye exam.

It may be surprising to know that exercising regularly is one of the most important ways to reduce your chances of falling. Exercise makes you stronger and helps you feel better. The most helpful exercises focus on improving balance and coordination. Lack of exercise leads to weakness and increases your chances of falling. Avoid wearing slippers and sneakers with deep treads. Your shoes should give good support and have thin non-slip soles.

Have your physician check you for osteoporosis or schedule a dexa scan or bone density screening test to determine whether there's been any thinning of your bones. Thin bones are more likely to break or fracture when injured.

Another precaution you can take is to bring all of your medicines to your doctor or pharmacist. Don't forget to include ones that don't need prescriptions such as cold medicines. As you get older, the way some medicines work in your body can change. Some medicines, or combinations of medicines, can make you drowsy or light-headed, which can lead to a fall.

Have your eyes checked regularly. You may be wearing the wrong glasses or have a condition such as glaucoma or cataracts that limits your vision. Poor vision can increase your chances of falling. As you get older, you need brighter lights to see well. Lampshades or frosted bulbs can reduce glare.

About half of all falls happen at home. To improve your homes safety use non-slip mats wherever possible and avoid using step stools. Remove things you can trip over from stairs and places where you walk. Either remove small throw rugs, or use double-sided tape to keep them from slipping. Have grab bars put in next to your toilet, tub and shower and handrails near stairs.

These simple tips can help you stay safe.

*QUESTION: My friend was recently diagnosed with colorectal cancer, but didn't have any symptoms. Is this a disease I should be tested for?*

ANSWER: Colorectal or colon cancer usually starts from polyps in the colon or rectum. A polyp is a growth that shouldn't be there. Over time, some polyps can turn to cancer.

Since Colorectal cancer is most often found in men and women age 50 and over, physicians generally agree that if you are in that age group a screening test for colorectal cancer could save your life. Screening tests can find polyps, so they can be removed before they turn into cancer and can find cancer in its early stages, when the chance of being cured is good.

The risk of getting colorectal cancer increases with age and may be higher if you, or a close relative have colorectal polyps or you have inflammatory bowel disease. Those at high risk may need earlier or more frequent tests than other people. Talk with your doctor about when you should begin screening and how often you should be tested.

Several different types of screening tests can be used to find polyps or colorectal cancer; often they are the only way to detect the cancer at the early stages because people with polyps or colorectal cancer sometimes don't have symptoms. Make sure to let your doctor know if you blood in or on your stool (bowel movement), a change in bowel habits, or persistent abdominal pain or cramps. Talk to your doctor about your screening options, it could save your life.