

SeniorHealth

FALL 2006

VOLUME 8, NO. 3

INSIDE: SeniorHealth

QUARTERLY NEWS FOR SENIORS

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AUTUMN IS THE SEASON FOR FLU VACCINATION

Have you received your flu shot? Since the heavy flu season usually begins in January, the best preparation is to be vaccinated in October through December for maximum protection, says Dr. Jorge Rivero, geriatrician at the UCI SeniorHealth Center.

About 36,000 people die from influenza each year in the United States, with seniors among the most at-risk. A flu shot helps protect against the three strains of influenza that are predicted to be prevalent during the flu season. Contrary to popular misconception, the shot does not cause the flu itself.

“A flu shot is the single best defense against the disease,” Rivero says.



Staying on Your Feet

Stumbling may be amusing to watch when a comedian takes a spill. But falls can be devastating when they happen to an older adult. In fact, falls are the leading cause of injury deaths and most common cause of nonfatal injuries and hospital admissions for trauma.

For an older adult, recovering from a fall can be protracted and painful, result in a loss of independence, and may even signal the beginning of a downward spiral of health.

More than one-third of adults 65 years of age or older experience falls each year. The causes vary widely and in majority of cases, falls usually result from interaction between risk factors in the senior’s health and contributing factors in the person’s environment.

What puts seniors at risk for falls? Arthritis, sudden dizziness when standing up, impaired thinking, declining vision, gait and balance problems, and the use of four or more medications are common risk factors. Sometimes, even taking over-the-counter medication, such as antihistamine for colds and allergies, may produce a reaction that contributes to a fall. Benign positional vertigo (feeling dizzy suddenly when moving one’s head or when rolling over in bed) is also often seen in seniors, and most of the time it can be cured with special treatment performed in a doctor’s office.

“Every senior with a history of falls should have a thorough evaluation by a physician to screen for risks and modify them the best we can,” says Dr. Chinh Le, geriatrician at University of California, Irvine Medical Center. Geriatricians are especially well-suited to evaluating fall risks and causes because they understand how

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FOR YOUR HEALTH

University of California, Irvine
Medical Center will become
smoke-free beginning
Nov. 16, 2006.

For the health of patients
and visitors, smoking will
be prohibited throughout
the medical center.

UCIrvine

Learn How to Prevent Falls

Want to take a class or attend a seminar on fall prevention? The next 16-session Balance and Mobility program begins in early January 2007. Hour-long seminars on related topics are scheduled for Nov. 15, 2006, and March 27, 2007. See page 3 for details. And read geriatrician Dr. Chinh Le's advice about fall prevention on page 1.

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multiple medical conditions interact in older adults.

Adults can take many steps to avoid dizziness and falls. A good place to start is a fun, eight-week program at UC Irvine Medical Center called "Balance and Mobility." The 16-session program is designed to improve senior's stability and help them become more mobile. It is for seniors who can safely walk 200 feet without assistive devices and are otherwise medically stable. See dates and other details on page 3 or call 1-877-UCI-DOCS (1-877-824-3627) for more information.

In addition, older adults should ask their doctor or pharmacist to review all of their medicines—traditional, alternative and over-the-counter—to reduce possible side effects and interactions.

Since most falls happen in the home, seniors should make their living quarters as safe as possible by:

- Removing tripping hazards such as throw rugs and clutter;
- Using nonslip mats in the bathtubs and shower floors;
- Installing grab bars next to toilets, tubs and showers;
- Putting handrails on both sides of stairways;
- Improving lighting throughout the home.

"With the growth of our aging population, falls have become one of the big concerns for seniors' health and are considered a 'geriatric syndrome,'" says Le. "But by talking with their doctors, seniors can help prevent falls. We have evidence that when we use strategies that involve assessment and intervention effectively, we can reduce the rate of falling."