

Enhancing elderly care: Fall risk screening in primary care

UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of New Jersey

Falls are the leading cause of injury-related deaths among adults ages 65 and older. Each year, 1 in 4 older adults experience a fall, resulting in over 3 million emergency department visits. These statistics highlight the urgent need for effective fall risk screening and prevention strategies.

Common risk factors

- **Advanced age:** The risk of falling increases with age due to decreased muscle strength and balance
- **Medication use:** Certain medications, such as sedatives and antidepressants, can cause dizziness and impair balance
- **Chronic conditions:** Conditions like arthritis, diabetes and heart disease can affect mobility and stability
- **Environmental hazards:** Poor lighting, slippery floors and clutter can contribute to falls

Fall risk screening

An effective screening involves a combination of patient history, physical assessments and standardized tools. The CDC's **Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths and Injuries (STEADI)** initiative provides a comprehensive framework for screening, assessing and intervening to reduce fall risk. Key screening methods include:

- **Patient questionnaires:** Tools like the **Stay Independent questionnaire** help identify patients at risk
- **Physical assessments:** Tests such as the **Timed Up and Go (TUG)** and the **30-Second Chair Stand** evaluate gait, strength and balance
- **Medication review:** Assessing medications that may increase fall risk is crucial

Prevention strategies

Once at-risk patients are identified, implementing targeted interventions can significantly reduce fall risk. Strategies include:

- **Exercise programs:** Encourage participation in strength and balance exercises tailored to older adults. UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of New Jersey maintains a [list of senior centers](#) throughout the state – many that offer senior exercise classes.
- **Home modifications:** Recommend changes to the home environment, such as installing grab bars and improving lighting
- **Medication management:** Adjust medications that may contribute to fall risk and educate patients on potential side effects
- **Vitamin D supplementation:** Ensure adequate vitamin D intake to support bone health and muscle function

By proactively screening for fall risk and implementing preventive measures, primary care providers can make a substantial impact on the health and independence of elderly patients. Together, we can reduce the incidence of falls and enhance the quality of life for our aging population.



Questions? We're here to help.

For chat options and contact information, visit our [contact resources](#).