



# HOT NEWS

## Fall Prevention

Falls are the leading cause of fatal and non-fatal injuries for older Americans. Falls threaten seniors' safety and independence and generate enormous economic and personal costs. Every 13 seconds, an older adult is treated in the emergency room for a fall and an older adult dies from a fall every 20 seconds.

Here on Camano Island, those figures are echoed: one of the most frequent calls for help that Camano Island Fire & Rescue answers is related to falls within our elderly population. Falls, with or without injury, also carry a heavy quality of life impact. A growing number of older adults fear falling and, as a result, limit their activities and social engagements. This can result in further physical decline, depression, social isolation, and feelings of helplessness.

However, **falling is not an inevitable result of aging**. Through practical lifestyle adjustments, evidence-based falls prevention programs and clinical-community partnerships, the number of falls among seniors can be substantially reduced. The good news about falls is that most of them can be prevented. The key is to know where to look. Here are some common factors that can lead to a fall:

- **Balance and gait:** As we age, most of us lose some coordination, flexibility and balance, primarily through inactivity, making it easier to fall.
- **Vision:** In the aging eye, less light reaches the retina making contrasting edges, tripping hazards, and obstacles harder to see.
- **Medications:** Some prescriptions and over the counter medications can cause dizziness, dehydration or interactions with each other that can lead to a fall.
- **Environment:** Most seniors have lived in their homes for a long time and have never thought about simple modifications that might keep it safer as

they age.

- **Chronic conditions:** More than 90% of older adults have at least one chronic condition like diabetes, stroke, or arthritis. Often, these increase the risk of falling because they result in lost function, inactivity, depression, pain, or multiple medications.

Whether protecting yourself or a loved one, here are 6 steps to reduce falls:

1. **Have an open and honest talk about these concerns.** Many older adults recognize that falling is a risk, but believe it won't happen to them, even if they've already fallen in the past.
2. **Discuss their current health conditions.** Find out if your older loved one is experiencing any problems with managing their own health. Are they having trouble remembering to take their medications? Are they experiencing side effects?
3. **Ask about their last eye checkup.** If your older loved one wears glasses, make sure the prescription is current. Remember that using tint-changing lenses can be hazardous when going from bright sun into darkened buildings and homes. Bifocals can be problematic on stairs, so it's important to be cautious.
4. **Notice if they're holding onto walls, furniture, or someone else when walking or if they appear to have difficulty walking or rising from a chair.** These are all signs that it might be time to see a physical therapist. This can help your loved one improve their balance, strength and gait through exercise. They might also recommend a cane or walker.
5. **Talk about their medications.** If your older loved one is having a hard time keeping track of medicines, or is experiencing side effects, encourage them to discuss their concerns with their doctor and pharmacist. Suggest that they have their medications reviewed each time they get a new prescription.
6. **Do a walk-through** safety assessment of their home. There are many simple and inexpensive ways to make a home safer such as increased lighting and grab rails on stairs and in the bathroom.

Many people think that falls are a normal part of aging. The truth is, they're not. Most falls can be prevented and you have the power to reduce the risk. Exercising, managing medications, having vision-checks and making a living environment safer are all steps that help prevent falls. Please visit the National Council on Aging at [www.ncoa.org](http://www.ncoa.org) for more tips on fall prevention or contact Camano Island Fire & Rescue at (360) 387-1512 for more information.

### Serve on the CAG?

Our newly formed Citizen's Advisory Group has begun meeting but there are still open positions. If interested, please contact Assistant Chief Levon Yengoyan at 360-387-1512 for further information.

### Change Your Clock, Change Your Battery (Daylight Savings Time begins March 13)

Smoke alarms save lives! If there is a fire in your home, smoke spreads fast and you need smoke alarms to give you

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## Visit our Website.

Our website contains the latest information regarding your fire department. Please visit us at [www.camanofire.com](http://www.camanofire.com)

time to get out. Most fatal fires occur at night and every home needs working smoke alarms to provide the early warning you need to get out. Having a working smoke alarm cuts the chances of dying in a reported fire in half.

71% of smoke alarms which failed to operate have missing, disconnected, or dead batteries. Please remember the life saving habit of changing and testing the batteries in smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors when changing your clocks.

