Orthopaedic Connection

Poor Balance, A Reason For Falling

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Sometimes it seems to me that as an Orthopaedic Surgeon our patients falling have reached epidemic proportions. Aging definitely is associated with many conditions that cause dizziness and a sense of imbalance.

Why Patients Fall

Very often there is no apparent reason and the person can’t explain it. When they can explain what happened the list is endless. I won’t even bother to list any because those causes are the immediate cause. The tip of the iceberg. Tripping on a rug may seem like the cause, but read on.

Normal Balance

Staying upright under normal circumstances (and if there is an upset) requires many systems working together like a finely tuned machine. Like what?

- Well the brain is in charge of coordinating everything.
- Sensory information is sent from skin
- Eyes tell where you are in your surroundings
- Muscles and joints coordinate movements and need to be working properly.
- Inner ear tells the brain how you are moving
- Heart has to efficiently pump blood
- Blood vessels have to maintain your blood pressure

Going Out Of Balance

What are the causes? You mean besides stepping on your cat? OK, here goes. In addition more than one cause is happening at the same time in many instances.

- Low blood pressure when you stand up
- Malfunction of inner ear, vestibular system
- Irregular heart beat
- Failing vision
- Neuropathy (diabetes and other)
- Muscle weakness of aging in legs especially, but arms also
- Arthritis of large joints which cause pain and the joint seeming to “lock” or give way at times.
- Overweight
- Anxiety
- Post stroke deficits
- Brain dysfunction, dementia
- Medication (maybe should be at the top of the list)
- Spinal Stenosis
- Probably a few more
It is amazing any of us over 50 can stay upright at all!! And even people under 50 can have some of these things also that cause them to wipe out.

These are only the medical factors that contribute to poor balance and falling. We said nothing about ice, snow and all the household hazards that are present in our houses. And don’t forget the cat.

Besides all of the above we humans often do really dumb things that get us into trouble and cause bad things to happen to us. Is there any cure for poor judgment?

Is It Hopeless?
Sometimes I am afraid it is. But then other times I think that things could be better if the patient had the following:

- Good attentive medical care and not too many meds
- Help to remove household hazards
- Used better judgment
- Take advantage of balance programs that are available. Ask your primary care to arrange for you.
- Use of a walker inside and out

My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.

Office Website and Gratiot County Herald Archive
Wow! Your window to the Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal world opens at www.orthopodsurgeon.com. It contains the Website Library of information, Your Orthopaedic Connection and GCH archive of all previous articles.

You will be amazed at all the helpful information it contains.
All of the information pertains to everything I treat in the office and hospital.
Be well.

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