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**Falls Prevention Exercise – vital for elderly across Winter
Researchers at NeuRA urge elderly to consider five basic falls prevention exercises**

Falls are the leading cause of injury related hospitalisation in persons aged 65 years and over, and account for 14% of emergency admissions and 4% of all hospital admissions in this age group. Deterioration in the functional capacity to stand, move and exercise can manifest itself as falls and deterioration in maintaining balance.

Neuroscience Research Australia, (NeuRA) is promoting a series of simple exercises that can be done at home to assist with the management of balance. This exercise is more important during the colder months when people tend to be less active in winter, the hours of daylight are shorter and vitamin D deficiency is more likely. It has been estimated that majority of hospitalisations due to falls and falls related injuries are relatively higher in the winter season. Also, exercise performance can be decreased by ageing and is frequently accompanied by reductions in cognitive performance.

Commenting on the importance of fall risk management in the over 65 age group Assoc Prof Kim Delbaere says, “falls are often caused by a number of age-related conditions, such as cataracts, reduced balance and muscle strength, slower reaction times. The good news is that many falls can all be prevented by doing a series of simple in-home exercises designed to improve balance.” Assoc Prof Delbaere is the creator of the Standing Tall program at NeuRA.

“StandingTall is a home-based exercise program, designed for and with older adults. It offers a variety of tailored and evidence-based exercises, delivered through an iPad. Our previous research has taught us that, to prevent falls, older people should exercise for 2 to 3 hours per week. By embracing technology, we are providing an alternative exercise opportunity, which is engaging, fun and motivating, hoping to generate higher levels of adherence over a longer period of time.

Prof Stephen Lord has undertaken fall prevention research at NeuRA since 1994; He says “the major serious injuries that result from falls include head injuries and fractures of the wrist, neck, trunk and hip. Falls can also result in disability, restriction of activity and fear of falling which can reduce quality of life and independence. Falls also contribute to an older person being admitted to a nursing home.”

According to population projections, falls and injury by falls in 65-85 year olds in the NSW community will increase from the current 1.09 million to a staggering 1.78 million. Hip fractures in people aged 65+ will increase from the current 6,972 to 16,079 by 2051 which will cost over $320 million. Therefore, in older people, falls lead to serious illness and can be fatal with major societal costs.

To avoid the incidence of falls and their aftermath, researchers in the Falls and Balance group at NeuRA strongly recommend the five-step exercise schedule, (provided on request), appropriate exposure to the sun and regular intake of vitamin D for frailer older people who spend little time outdoors..

**Resources available:**

* Falls datasheet from Australian Bureau of Statistics
* 5 step exercise video
* 5 step Winter exercise flyer
* Video interview of Assoc Prof Kim Delbaere speaking about Falls prevention
* Recently published papers from NeuRA Falls and Balance lab



*Picture: Dr Kim Delbaere explaining the standing tall program*

For more information or scheduling interviews please contact:

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