



**Tuality Healthcare**  
*Building a healthier community.*  
Center for Geriatric Psychiatry  
Tuality Forest Grove Hospital  
1809 Maple Street  
Forest Grove, Oregon 97116  
503-359-6969

# info

## mental health

### Walking

As individuals grow older, decreased circulation and other physical problems can affect their balance and ability to walk. In addition some people will begin to experience a decline in problem solving and judgment leading to safety concerns. Another factor that can impact a person's ability to walk is medication side effects. There are occasions that the amount of medicine needed to achieve the desired benefit may impair mobility.

To reduce fear of falling when walking:

- Allow the person to hold onto your arm.
- Walk with him/her holding your hand.
- Walk beside the individual with your hand held out but not touching.
- Gradually widen the distance between you and him/her.
- Encourage the use of handrails and assistive devices.

Remember:

- Give praise for walking.
- Do not reinforce staying in bed or chair. Exercise is important for mental and physical health.
- Do a home survey to identify and remove items that could cause tripping or

slipping. (Throw rugs, stools, doorstops, torn flooring, high doorsills, electrical cords...)

- Avoid highly polished floor surfaces. They are slippery and a confused or poor sighted individual may mistake it for water and fall trying to avoid it.
- Keep assisted devices well maintained and convenient to encourage use.
- Provide shoes that fit well, have soles that provide traction and do not have strings that can be left or come untied. Also you may want to donate the high heels to charity to get them out of the closet. (Consider the curly elastic shoe laces on the market.)
- Make walking a pleasant activity. Stop to look at the flowers, talk about the old days in the neighborhood, stop for an ice cream cone.
- Don't over do it. Respect endurance limitations, but don't give in to unfounded complaining.
- Use a slow, steady pace with short comfortable step.
- Keep natural paths open in the house. Move furniture out of the way and resist rearranging.

## Unwillingness to accept the need for assistance or assistive devices

- Allow him/her time to get used to and proficient in the use of a walker, cane, wheelchair or other device.
- Make sure clothing is functional for using the device. Special clothing can be purchased for wheelchair bound individuals. Provide a lap blanket for modesty, avoid flowing skirts, wide leg pants or other loose clothing.
- Allow time for emotional and physical adjustment. Visit family with one level homes and easy entrance and exit. Later make short trips to handicapped accessible stores and public buildings such as the library. Later he/she may be willing and ready to go out to dinner or the Senior Center.
- Don't make a big production of it. A low key, matter of fact approach is best. Offer help when needed, but encourage maximum independence.
- Keep any devices in safe working order. Know how they work and make sure you know how to train the person to use the device or arrange for him/her to be trained.
- Let children know that the devices are not toys and are not to be treated as such.
- Encourage family and frequently visiting friends to reduce barriers to mobility as much as possible. That way a visit doesn't become a big production.
- Try to treat the device as just part of every day life. Keep routines as normal as possible. (But do allow extra time so he/she doesn't feel rushed or a burden.)