

Comprehensive screening test for falling risk developed by MU researcher

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More than one-third of adults ages 65 and older fall each year in the U.S., and, according to the Centers for Disease Control, 40 percent of all seniors admitted to the hospital are there due to injuries from falls. However, a new study has found that falls are not just a problem for older adults. Researchers have found that people in their 20s and 30s have significant issues affecting their balance, indicating an increased risk for falling. Carmen Abbott, an associate clinical professor in the University of Missouri School of Health Professions, has developed a screening test that could quickly diagnose an individual's risk of falling at any age. This primary fall prevention strategy could then be used to reduce the risk of falling.

"It's very important for adults to understand their own fall-risk factors," Abbott said. "This test can become a primary prevention strategy that can be used in regular screenings."

Abbott's fall-risk screening was given to 190 adults between the ages of 20-79. Surprisingly, the study found significant concerns in physical performance for adults in the 20-30 age group, making the test relevant for adults well below the age of 65.

"Falling prevention should include all ages," Abbott said. "It isn't just a problem for [older adults](#). Some participants were in awe of how well they did or didn't do."

Abbott's test is a combination of a health questionnaire and physical performance tests. In the questionnaire, patients are surveyed on potential risk factors, including history of falls, dizziness problems, and type and number of medications they take. Following the questionnaire, individuals undergo a [physical performance](#) screening with eight fall-risk indicator tests, such as habitual gait speed, single leg stance and ankle range of motion.

Abbott suggests that individuals practice certain

exercises and be aware of health concerns in an effort to decrease their risk of falling. A common recommendation for keeping people well balanced during daily activities such as stair climbing is to practice a "single leg stance" with eyes open for 30 seconds and eyes closed for at least 5 seconds. To complete a single leg stance:

- Stand on one leg with arms crossed at chest level.
- Attempt to keep the opposite foot off the ground for 30 seconds.
- Practice this drill in a hallway or close to a counter in case balance is lost.
- Stop timing if the raised foot touches the ground or if the body is leaning more than 45 degrees.

"What's most important is for adults to know their risk and stay as active as possible," Abbott said. "Everybody knows cardiac risk factors; people also should be aware of their fall-risk factors and take steps to prevent falls."

An abstract of Abbott's research has been published in the *Journal of Neurologic Physical Therapy* and the study was presented at the American Physical Therapy Association's Combine Sections meeting in February.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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