

keeping your patients on their feet

fact sheet

falls prevention

Older people and Falls Prevention:

Health Professionals want older people to enjoy their remaining years being healthy, independent and mobile for as long as possible. Reducing an older person's fear about being 'assessed' or considered 'at risk' can minimise their concern at being seen as old and frail. Information about falls is relevant to everybody, not only people over 65. Unlike older adults, while many younger children fall few of their injuries lead to death or permanent injuryⁱ.

Rather than focusing on the negative risk of falls, it is better to stress the benefits of improving strength and balance and remaining independent for as long as possible. Remember, falls can be prevented. At present we know that:

- One in three people over 65 fall each year, with higher rates in those over 75ⁱⁱ.
- Falls are the leading cause of death from injury for people over 65ⁱⁱⁱ.
- Increasing age, gender, medication use and predisposing medical conditions including Parkinson's disease, osteoporosis and vision problems are risk factors for falls and fall-related injuries.

Falls Prevention Strategies:

The most effective strategies combine a range of interventions addressing the major falls risk factors. Success is likely to be optimised by early identification of patients at risk and before a serious fall occurs. Strategies such as:

- Encouraging older people to participate in regular exercise – particularly exercises that focus on strength and balance; e.g. Tai Chi and weights.
- Undertaking a Multifactorial Falls Risk Assessment including health and environmental screenings with linkages to intervention services.
- Reviewing medications^{iv}.

How to discuss Falls Prevention with your patients:

Encouraging patients to talk about their falls, trips and stumbles is important, so targeted interventions can be put in place to prevent more serious injuries occurring.

Useful conversation starters:

'We want to make sure you stay strong on your feet.

Have you lost your footing or tripped in the past 12 months?'

'I know how important it is for you to remain independent. How are you going on your feet, have you had a fall or slip in the last year?'

Where to start with Falls Prevention:

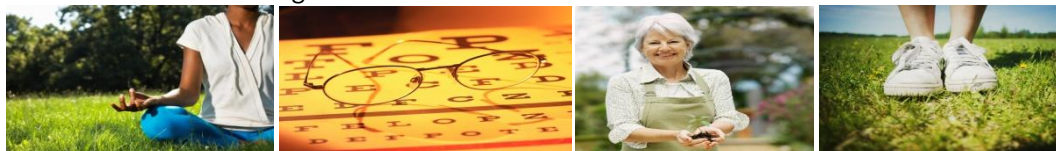
Waiting Area: Display Falls Prevention resources

Department of Human Services p: 03 9096 7391

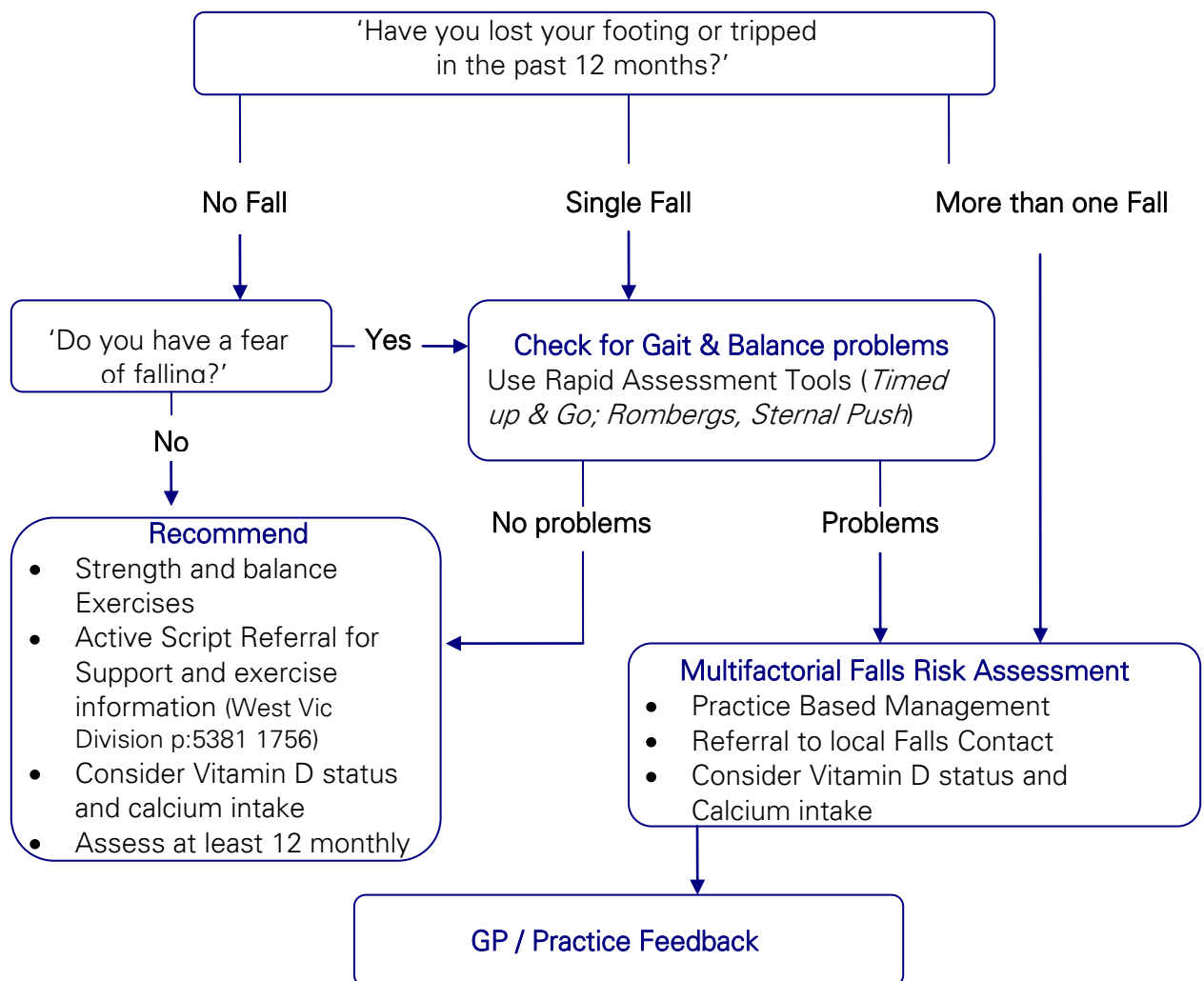
www.health.vic.gov.au/agedcare/maintaining/falls

Consider the layout of your waiting area as you would when assessing a home for falls risks.

GP / PN Consult: Use the Falls Risk Identification and Management Pathway on the reverse side as a guide:



Falls Risk Identification & Management Pathway



Local Falls Referral Options

Strength and balance exercises	Continence Nurse
Gait and balance Clinic	Vision Australia
Wimmera Base Hospital	Occupational Therapist
Stawell Regional Health	Dietician
Falls Prevention Program	Ophthalmologist
Casterton	Optometrist
Community Health Nurse	District Nurse
Falls Prevention resources	
Physiotherapy / Exercise Physiologist	
Aged Care Assessment Team	
Pharmacist – Home Medicines Review (HMR)	
Home & Community Care (HACC)	
Active Script Service (Exercise support for patients - West Vic Division)	

ⁱ <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/abridged/325/7356/128>

ⁱⁱ Bradley C and Harrison JE (2007). Hospitalisations due to falls in older people, Australia, 2003-04. Injury research and statistics series number 32. (AIHW cat. No. INJCAT 96). AIHW, Adelaide.

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing (2005), Home & Community Care Slips and Falls Learning Resource, CSHISC, Sydney.

^{iv} Barwon Health (2005), Falls prevention guidelines for general practitioners for assessing and managing older people, DHS, Melbourne.