

# What to Do If An Elderly Relative FALLS!

by World Renowned Neurosurgeon, Triathlete, Nutrition and Brain Health Expert  
Joseph C. Maroon, MD, FACS and Jeff Bost PAC

Falling from a standing position is fun for a toddler learning to walk, but for an older adult, it can have serious consequences. In the past we have discussed ways to fall-proof your environment and reduce the risk of falls – avoiding throw rugs, installing grab bars and automatic sensor lights in bathrooms and railings on both sides of stairs. But falls can and will occur. According to the CDC millions of people 65 and older fall each year.

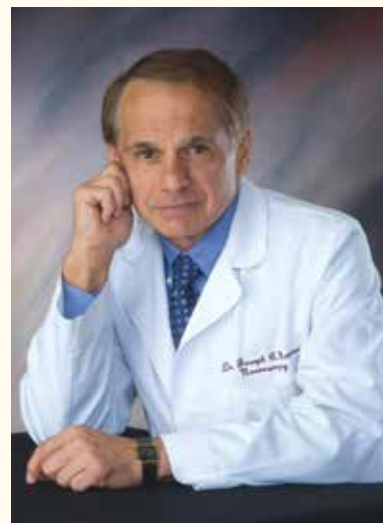
An older person's re-occurring falls often signal a dramatic change in health, such as dementia, that needs to be addressed. A fall checklist can help a relative or caregiver recognize the underlying cause and when to seek professional help.

## FALL-RISK CHECKLIST:

- 1** First and most important, once you learn of a fall event, immediately seek appropriate medical help. If there are obvious injuries, pain, confusion, cuts, call 911 at once!
- 2** Often a fall can occur and the relative or caregiver does not learn about it right away. Look for signs of a fall. Is there evidence of bruising, fever, cuts, limping, confusion, broken items? Very often a person is embarrassed or afraid to reveal the fall. Even when directly asked, less than half will tell their doctor.
- 3** Be sure to have a list of medications and which, if any, had been taken the day of the fall. If insulin or other injectables are used, ask for the number of units and timing of the dosage. Certain medications like insulin, blood pressure and cardiac meds offer a greater fall-risk. Also ask about bleeding, especially GI bleeding in the stool since blood loss and anemia can increase falls.
- 4** Determine the time of the fall. Was it related to getting up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom? More frequent urination might mean a urine infection, a factor in confusion and falls.
- 5** Following a medical assessment and the person's return to their prior residence, start fall-risk reduction changes.
- 6** This may include greater supervision and monitoring of medications, walking aids and other interventions.

### **An elderly person's fall should never be ignored. Always seek expert medical advice!**

*St. Barnabas Health System has staff experienced in home fall risk assessments and home care therapists to help an older person improve strength, flexibility and coordination designed to reduce fall risk enabling him or her to remain in their own homes. For more information, contact the St. Barnabas Medical Center at 724-443-7231 or check out the website at [StBarnabasHealthSystem.com](http://StBarnabasHealthSystem.com).*



*Dr. Joseph Maroon partners with St. Barnabas Health System and its Memory Care program.*

