Gravity Sometimes Wins

**HIGH  ALTITUDE  HEALTH**

**A weekly article by Debbie Holmes**



**Gravity sometimes wins!**

Falls. Ouch, they hurt.

Literally, the day before I left for my vacation, I slipped and landed hard on my upper thigh. It happened so fast. Even in my protective uniform, good winter boots and paying attention my feet went out from under me, and I landed square on my upper thigh, just inches from my hip.

After pulling myself up and checking my joints and my pride, I knew that I didn’t seriously hurt anything. Thankfully. However, I felt the fall for almost a week as my hip, shoulder and body recovered from the sudden jolt of the fall. The bruise on my thigh was enormous adding to my beach attire on vacation. Simply beautiful!

Falls are so scary. Honestly, they are one of the most worrisome events that can occur to any of us, no matter what our age but most importantly as we age. A concussion in a child or a broken hip can be extremely serious and should never be taken lightly.

According to the World Health Organization, a fall is defined as an event which results in a person coming to rest inadvertently on the ground or floor or lower level. Falls are the second leading cause of accidental or unintentional injury deaths worldwide, after traffic accidents. Most falls are not fatal. Adults over the age of 65 suffer the greatest number of fatal falls.

The most common injuries that occur from falling include head injuries, broken or fractured bones, soft tissue injuries and shoulder or rotator cuff injuries. The standard rule of thumb is that a fall greater than you are tall, should be considered and treated as serious with consideration of seeing a physician.

Key risk factors for falls include age, gender and overall health of the individual.

Unfortunately, older people have the highest risk of death or serious injury from falling. The level of risk for falling may be partly due to physical, sensory and cognitive changes that happen with aging and a combination of environmental concerns that haven’t been adapted.

Children are the second group statistically that fall a lot adding to the injury rates. Children’s falls are largely caused by developmental changes and challenges. Increasing levels of independence coincides with more challenging behaviors. Unfortunately, inadequate adult supervision is a common cited risk factor for falls in children.

When it comes to gender, both genders are at risk for falling however males are more likely to die from a fall, while females suffer more non-fatal falls. Possible explanations of the higher death rate for men, is that they tend to participate in higher levels of risk-taking behaviors and hazards with occupation.

My pre-vacation fall is a prime example that we won’t always stop ourselves from falling, no matter how focused we are. However, we can protect ourselves from the injuries that might occur if a fall was to happen.

While checking my pride after my fall, I joked about not realizing that I still bounced well for my age. Thankfully, because I could have seriously injured myself.

Prevention for falls and protection of your body include various components.

Environmental risk factors within and around you need to be prioritized. For example, the ice on the step that caused my fall should have been cleared and/or sanded. Simple things like throw rugs, dog toys, clothes, the lighting in your home and unexpected barriers all can cause tripping and falling. So, prepare your space and stay aware of your environment.

Clinical risk factors for things like medication side effects, low blood pressure, changes in vision, general malaise, numbness in extremities, issues with inner ear can often be the culprit of balance issues and falls. Always, talk to your physician about any of these concerns.

Physical risk factors are also a big concern. Joint stiffness, arthritis and pain limiting your movement. Muscle deterioration and weakness prevents the body from preforming daily movements and one unlucky movement could find you on the floor.

Exercise might not stop a fall, but it will protect you from worse injury. It’s the only way to keep your muscles, bones and joints strong so that you just might bounce a little better and recover quicker when gravity wins.