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# HFYH: Taking a Stand to Prevent Falls



*David A. Summers, RN, CFRN, EMT-P, Trauma Nurse Outreach Coordinator with the Health Care District of Palm Beach County educating residents at a 2014 event in Delray Beach about ways to prevent falling.*

Taking a tumble is a risk for those who climb ladders or trees. For older adults, staying on their feet can also present a challenge. While falls are not a normal part of aging, every second of every day in the United States an adult 65 years or older suffers a fall. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one out of four older adults will fall each year in the United States. [1]

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“Gravity is not our friend as we get older,” said David A. Summers, RN,

CFRN, EMT-P, Trauma Nurse Outreach Coordinator with the Health Care District of Palm Beach County. “In Florida, 3,300 people died last year as the result of a fall, most of them someone’s grandmother or grandfather.”

In Palm Beach County, Florida, patients who fall account for 44% of all traumatic injuries treated within the county’s Trauma System. Summers said in 2019, nearly 300 of those falls were fatal and of those, 250 were patients 65 years or older. According to the CDC, each year at least 300,000 older people are hospitalized for hip fractures. [2] In fact, falling once doubles your chances of falling again. [3]

“Many factors can lead to a fall, such as loss of vision, being off-balance, not lifting your feet and the use of blood thinners,” Summers said. “Many people who fall, even if they are not injured, become afraid of falling. That leads to less activity, becoming weaker and ultimately, more prone to falling again and having a more serious outcome.”

Summers said senior adults most often fall while getting in and out of bed, when getting on or off the toilet, or walking at night when the lights are off.

While falling can be painful and costly, the good news is that falls are preventable. Summers conducts educational outreach events that instruct senior adults how to keep on their feet and avoid the risk of a fall. He recommends family members get involved as well. Together, they should ensure there is adequate lighting and eliminate any trip hazards in the home, like area rugs or power cords. Seniors should observe if there are changes in vision and have their hearing and vision checked annually as well as update their eyeglasses.

“Encourage the use of assistive devices, like walkers, and install grab bars, especially in bathrooms and showers,” Summers said. “It’s also

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# Strong Today, Falls Free Tomorrow

## 6 Steps to Prevent a Fall

Every 15 seconds, an older adult is seen in an emergency department for a fall-related injury.



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| <p><b>1</b> Find a good balance and exercise program<br/>Look to build balance, strength, and flexibility. Find a program you like and take a friend.</p>                                  | <p><b>4</b> Get your vision and hearing checked annually and update your eyeglasses<br/>Your eyes and ears are key to keeping you on your feet.</p>  |
| <p><b>2</b> Talk to your health care provider<br/>Ask for an assessment of your risk of falling. Share your history of recent falls.</p>   | <p><b>5</b> Keep your home safe<br/>Remove tripping hazards, increase lighting, make stairs safe, and install grab bars in key areas.</p>            |
| <p><b>3</b> Regularly review your medications with your doctor or pharmacist<br/>Make sure side effects aren't increasing your risk of falling. Take medications only as prescribed.</p>  | <p><b>6</b> Talk to your family members<br/>Enlist their support in taking simple steps to stay safe. Falls are not just a seniors' issue.</p>      |

To learn more, visit the Health Care District of Palm Beach County at [www.traumahawk.org](http://www.traumahawk.org)



September 2014

important to wear proper footwear like flat, rubber-soled shoes. In addition, review medications and make sure physician orders are properly followed.”

Family members should also talk to their loved one’s provider about checking for Vitamin D deficiency and advise the physician of any recent falls since seniors often withhold that information from their doctor.

One of the best tips to prevent falling is to remain physically active and exercise. Flexibility, strength-training and building balance are key. Seniors can benefit from taking yoga, tai chi and other exercise classes<sup>TOP</sup> at the same time as their friends or relatives online during the COVID-19



pandemic.

This year, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis recognized the week of September 21st as Falls Prevention Awareness Week. To learn more about preventing falls, visit the CDC's website, the National Council on Aging's website and the Health Care District of Palm Beach County's Falls Awareness page where you can print the flyer "Six Steps to Prevent a Fall."

"Motivating your loved ones to keep moving at a slow and steady pace is important as they age," said Summers. "Being observant and engaged can ensure they remain active and stay safe."

## About the Health Care District

The Health Care District of Palm Beach County provides primary medical care, dental services and COVID-19 testing for adults and children at the C. L. Brumback Primary Care Clinics, health coverage programs for eligible uninsured residents, a pharmacy operation, a nationally-recognized Trauma System, registered nurses in nearly 170 public schools, short and long-term skilled nursing at the 5-star rated Edward J. Healey Rehabilitation and Nursing Center in Riviera Beach, and acute care at its teaching hospital, Lakeside Medical Center, which is accredited by The Joint Commission and serves the rural Glades' communities.

## About the C. L. Brumback Primary Care Clinics TOP

This project is supported by the Health Resources and Services

Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under grant number H80CS25684 for Health Center Cluster in the award amount of \$7,019,063. Of the total project, 78.6% is financed with nongovernmental sources. This information or content and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government. The C. L. Brumback Primary Care Clinics were granted Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA) deeming status effective January 1, 2020.

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[1] Bergen G, Stevens MR, Burns ER. Falls and Fall Injuries Among Adults Aged  $\geq 65$  Years — United States, 2014. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2016;65:993–998. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6537a2>

[2] Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP). 2012. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD. <http://hcupnet.ahrq.gov> External. Accessed 5 August 2016.

[3] O'Loughlin J et al. Incidence of and risk factors for falls and injurious falls among the community-dwelling elderly. American journal of epidemiology, 1993, 137:342-54.

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## Public Meetings

read all public meetings

C. L. Brumback Primary Care Clinics-District Clinic  
Holdings, Inc. Board of Directors

**Date:** April 24, 2024

**Location:**

In-Person & Zoom Meeting - SEE MEETING DETAILS INCLUDED.

Lakeside Medical Center

39200 Hooker Highway

Belle Glade, FL 33430

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