



## Leave the Falling to the Leaves

By Leslie Linta, Valley Care Adult Day Services

It's Autumn: the air is crisp, the days are growing shorter, and the leaves are falling. This season lends itself to discussing a very important topic for older adults: Fall Prevention. In fact, National Fall Prevention Week is held annually in September.

"A fall with injury is a catastrophic event for an older adult," said Susan Nirschel, RN, Director of Valley Care Programs. "Falls are one of the strongest indicators of declining condition, but in many cases, they are preventable."

Consider these suggestions to help decrease your loved one's risk of falling:

**Visit the Doctor:** If your loved one is having falls, it is best to start with their doctor. The doctor can do a thorough evaluation, including checking for underlying medical conditions that may be contributing to falls, as well as medications, or medication interactions, that may cause balance issues. The doctor can also refer your loved one for therapy if needed.

**Evaluate for Home Safety:** Check the house for "danger zones," including any items that may obstruct the walkways in the home. Cords, piles of items, poor lighting, and loose rugs all may contribute to falls. There are also agencies that can assist with a thorough home safety evaluation, like *Home Safe Home*, which serves Allegheny County. *Home Safe Home* can be reached at 724-496-1558.

**Keep them Active:** Physical activity can improve strength, coordination, and balance. Light exercise, including regular walking, will help to build strength in your loved one.

**Encourage Proper Footwear:** Socks are to blame for many falls at home. Any footwear without some type of tread increases the risk of slip and fall accidents. Footwear that fits properly, with a non-skid sole, is best for fall prevention.

**Use Assistive Devices:** If our loved one uses an assistive device, like a cane or walker, encourage them to use it and keep it in their eyesight. It may be tempting for them to use walls and other furniture to aid in balance when getting around at home, but these items may not be sturdy enough to support them. Tables tip, chairs tilt, and distance between furniture changes. It is always safest to use a device made for this purpose than to improvise.

Fall Prevention Interventions, although not overly costly, are worth their weight in gold by avoiding preventable injuries and helping your loved one to remain independent.