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## The Right Way to Fall

### PT Corner

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It happens to all of us—we trip, stumble, or fall. Hopefully, we bounce right back up, furtively looking around to make sure no one saw us. We brush ourselves off and quickly assess our bodies for any injuries. Usually we don't hurt ourselves seriously, just sustaining a bruise or small abrasion which heals in a couple of weeks. But according to the CDC, every second of every day an older adult falls. In 2014, older adults experienced 29 million falls leading to 7 million injuries. It is estimated that falls cause more than a third of emergency room visits for all adults due to injuries such as a fractured wrist, hip, or a concussion.

Healthcare professionals tend to spend the majority of their time treating those who have fallen, or preventing falls in the first place. They rarely broach the subject of "the right way to fall" and how to minimize the risk for serious injury.

Since it is practically inevitable that each of us will fall in our lifetime, we should know what to do.

There are some techniques or strategies one can use which will decrease the impact and potential injury to the body in a fall.

Volleyball players learn how to dive and roll towards the floor to protect their body as part of their defensive strategy to retrieve the ball after a hard low hit. They practice this "dig" technique perfecting it in their play. And stuntmen must learn how to protect their bodies when performing stunts and acrobatic falls.

Here are some tips these athletes and experts use. Try not to tense your muscles fighting the fall. Stay relaxed and flow with the momentum, shifting your bodyweight to break up the impact of the fall over multiple areas of your body. This is what martial artists and stuntmen do. They may land on the front of their body and then roll onto the shoulder and hip, finishing on their back in one quick roll.

Try not to flail a leg or arm straight out. Rather, keep your elbows and knees bent to protect them. Bracing a fall with an outstretched arm increases your risk for breaking your wrist, elbow, or shoulder as the full impact of the fall is placed on the arm. I once had a patient who fell in the kitchen off a step ladder onto her arm as she tried to catch herself and fractured her shoulder. A few months later she fell in the park and broke the other shoulder as her arm was outstretched in front of her, holding onto a leash as her dog took off to chase a squirrel.

Finally, protect your head. Tuck it in slightly when falling. This will keep it from taking the impact and then rebounding into whiplash.

As you are falling, keep your arms down and try to land on your side over the fleshy areas of your body—the thigh and upper arm. Then quickly roll with momentum onto your back and butt with your head tucked. This is a safer way to fall and will hopefully keep you out of the emergency room.

### TIP FROM A TRAINER by Renee Elliott

#### Why You Want More Muscle

Muscle speeds your metabolism because muscle mass determines the number of calories you burn at rest. That means you can eat more without gaining weight!

Muscle gives you energy because workouts build the most important muscle—your heart. Exercise makes your heart muscle bigger and stronger, enabling you to work out harder and longer. More muscle mass also makes physical activity feel easier.

Muscle also helps you live longer, being a bet-

ter predictor of longevity than BMI, according to a study by the American Journal of Medicine. Exercise itself prevents disease, but if you do get sick, having stronger muscles helps your body cope with the strain of illness better so that you can recover faster.

