



A MATTER OF BALANCE

MANAGING CONCERNS ABOUT FALLS

Program Overview: Volunteer Lay Leader Model

A Matter of Balance is designed to reduce fear of falling and increase activity levels among older adults who manifest this concern. The program was developed and formally evaluated by The Roybal Center for Enhancement of Late-Life Function at Boston University with a grant from the National Institute on Aging. A Matter of Balance received the Archstone Foundation Award for Excellence in Program Innovation in 1998.

The Problem:

Studies indicate that up to half of community dwelling older adults experience fear of falling, and that many respond to this concern by curtailing activity. Being inactive results in loss of muscle strength and balance. It can also compromise social interaction and increase the risk for isolation, depression and anxiety. Fear of falling can actually contribute to falling.

The Program:

A Matter of Balance acknowledges the risk of falling but emphasizes practical coping strategies to reduce this concern. Trained facilitators conduct eight two-hour sessions designed for groups of 10 to 12 participants. During the class, participants learn to view falls and fear of falling as controllable and set realistic goals for increasing activity. They also find ways to change the environment to reduce fall risk factors and learn simple exercises to increase strength and balance.

The Grant:

In October 2003, the Administration on Aging awarded three-year evidence-based disease prevention grants. Southern Maine Agency on Aging, MaineHealth's Partnership for Healthy Aging, Maine Medical Center Division of Geriatrics, and the University of Southern Maine School of Social Work received funding to translate A Matter of Balance into a program that uses volunteer lay leaders as facilitators instead of health care professionals and to serve as an innovative national model for addressing fall prevention.

The Results:

Maine participants demonstrated significant improvements after completing A Matter of Balance in their level of falls management, falls control, level of exercise and social limitations with regard to concern about falling.

Program Recognition:

- 2002 - The Aging States Project
- 2002 - National Council on the Aging, Healthy Aging: A Good Investment, Exemplary

Programs for Senior Centers and Other Facilities

- 2003 - National Governors' Association
- 2003 - Journal of Physical Activity and Aging
- 2004 - National Council on the Aging, Partnering to Promote Healthy Aging
- 2004 - AHRQ Workshop, Evidence-Based Prevention Programs for Elders: Translating

Research to Community-Based Programs

- 2006 - American Society on Aging, Healthcare and Aging Award