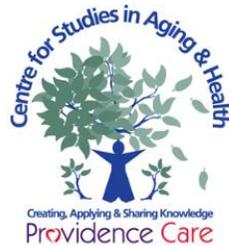




## The Centre for Studies in Aging & Health at Providence Care



### Overview of Frailty & the Older Adult

Education for Health Care Professionals  
Part 4: Managing the Frail Older Adult



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### Caring for Frail Older Adults

The following 7 strategies describe how to prevent or reduce frailty in vulnerable individuals and avoid further functional decline...

1. Optimize chronic disease management strategies.
2. Early detection of illness and possible adverse drug reactions.
3. Identifying and responding to problems such as falls, immobility, confusion, depression & incontinence.
4. Consider safety of the physical environment.
5. Maximize community and socio-economic supports.
6. Providing education and support to informal caregivers.



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## Preventing Further Functional Decline

Early identification of the onset of frailty with targeted interventions that promote healthy aging can help!

This might include:

- optimizing sensory inputs by assessing need for glasses and/or a hearing aid
- early identification of problems with cognition and mood
- ensuring adequate nutrition and hydration
- encouraging mobilization, appropriate use of walking aids and a safe accessible environment.
- paying attention to bowels and bladder function
- promoting activity and exercise

## Exercise & Aging



- Exercise started at age 35-39 results in 2 years of life gain!
- Exercise started at age 75 results in nearly 1/2 year of life gain!
- It's never too late to start!
- Recommend setting aside at least 30 minutes, five times a week for both stretching and muscle bulk-building exercises.

### Optimize Chronic Disease Management Strategies

- Customize “best practices” based on patient goals
  - Fewer than half of seniors with chronic conditions reported discussing their treatment goals with their physician or working with their physician to create a treatment
- Encourage the person to define their goals and to tell their care providers what is important to them.
- Use simple exploring questions: what are your wishes if your health deteriorates?
  - What kind of care do you want now?
  - What will you need in the future?
  - What do you expect to happen?
- Share information about resources and opportunities for support.
- Caregiver support is crucial!

[\(CIHI, 2011\)](#)

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### Early Detection of Illness or Adverse Drug Reactions

- Observe, investigate and report any changes in health status such as shortness of breath, worsening pain, new weakness etc.
- Observe for any adverse drug reactions especially if new medications are ordered.
  - Check to see if the older adult is keeping track of all medications that are ordered.
  - Look for evidence of possible medication errors such as missed doses on blister pack, multiple bottles of same medication or medications left lying around outside their container.

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### Identifying and Responding to New Health Issues

- The older frail adult may present atypically with new illness or with an adverse drug reaction which can result in new physical or behavioural symptoms.
- New onset or worsening of problems such as falls, immobility, confusion, low mood or incontinence may indicate new illness and should be reported.
- Drugs can have effects that are not intended or desired
  - Older people are 2 times as susceptible to the side effects of drugs as younger people.
  - Side effects are also likely to be more severe, affecting quality of life and resulting in visits to the doctor and in hospitalization.
  - With aging, there are changes in absorption, distribution, metabolism and excretion of drugs; some changes are more clinically relevant. The metabolism and excretion of many drugs decreases, requiring that doses of some drugs be adjusted.

(Ruscin 2014)

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### Consider the Safety of the Physical Environment: In the Home

A person's physical environment can have a huge impact on an their ability to ambulate but also compromise their safety by presenting potential falls risk. Some preventative actions include:

- assessing areas for trip or slip hazards
  - reducing or eliminate wet or oily surfaces, wipe up spills
  - removing loose, unanchored rugs or mats, securing (tacking, taping, etc.) mats, rugs and carpets that do not lay flat
  - covering uncovered cables
- identifying risk of poor lighting
- suggesting and assisting with reducing clutter
- closing bottom drawers
- keeping working areas and walkways well lit
- replacing used light bulbs and faulty switches

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### Consider the Safety of the Physical Environment: Outside the Home

If the person is mobile outside the home:

- assess entrances and pathways for trip or slip hazards
  - ensure pathways are uncluttered by leaves, twigs or other tripping hazards
  - ensure that shrubs and bushes are trimmed to avoid visual or physical interference with access to pathways
  - ensure any steps or ramps are in good condition
- identify risk of poor lighting: outdoor lights to entrances should be monitored for brightness
- arrange snow for snow removal and monitor for icy patches
- ensure handrails and railings are in good condition



### Maximize Community and Socio-economic Supports

Become aware of formal services and supports in the community so that you can share that information with those who may need it such as family and friends who are the caregivers.

Discussing and sharing your knowledge may help them:

- avoid preventable gaps in care
- reduce caregiver stress or burden
- improve safety and outcomes for the frail older adult
- become aware of types & amount of care options and how to access & utilize resources
- identify alternative ways to afford services or equipment



## Education and Support to Caregivers

- It is estimated that 80% of the support to frail older adults is provided by spouse, family, neighbors or friends.
- Providing this care can be a challenge with many other competing demands on the individuals.
- Studies such that caregiving stress is common and can have adverse effects by both the care receiver and provider.
- Providing education and information about the associated health problems and the best ways to provide for their care needs can help reduce the stress on the caregiver.



## Summary

- ☑ Frailty prevalence increases with increased age, social vulnerability and presence of multiple chronic diseases.
- ☑ The identification of frailty is predictive of undesirable outcomes such as future use of long term care and reduced life expectancy.
- ☑ Management of frail older adults should include:
  - preventing further functional decline
  - optimizing chronic disease management strategies
  - undertaking early detection of acute illness and polypharmacy
  - identifying new problems with falls, immobility, confusion, depression, incontinence)
  - monitoring and optimizing the person's environment
  - maximizing community and socio-economic supports
  - providing education and support to caregivers

