

23 March 2016

April falls day is no joke

While you may be on your guard against April Fools pranks this Friday, don't forget it's also April Falls Day – an opportunity to learn about a serious and often overlooked health issue for many older Australians – falls.

It is estimated that at least one third of people aged over 65 years fall every year, with even higher rates for people in aged-care facilities and hospitals.

With results that can include permanent disability, restriction of activity, loss of confidence and fear of falling, falls can have severe impacts on health and quality of life.

Director of South Western Sydney Local Health District's Health Promotion Service, Mandy Williams, said April Falls Day was a reminder for us to look out for falls risks around the home and workplace.

"It is especially important for those of us who care for or support older adults. Falls are everybody's business and we can all take steps to prevent them," said Ms Williams.

"Getting regular eye checks, asking your pharmacist or doctor for a medication review and keeping physically active are all helpful prevention measures.

"There is also sound evidence that exercise prevents falls in older people. Along with improving muscular strength, balance and walking speed, exercise has psychological benefits including enhancing mental ability and mood," she said.

To find a suitable exercise class near you go to www.activeandhealthy.nsw.gov.au.

Ms Williams said those who were too frail for exercise may benefit from specialised programs including Stepping On, a free regular group class run by health professionals.

"The Stepping On program is designed for people who are living at home and have fallen or are fearful of falling.

"It is one of the most effective fall prevention programs available, giving people the confidence to undertake their everyday activities safely.

"Stepping On covers a range of topics including vision, medicines and practical exercises to improve strength and balance. The group-based sessions run for two hours a week for seven weeks, followed by a refresher session two months later," Ms Williams said.

If you are interested in attending a Stepping On program, or want to refer a friend or family member, call 8738 5911 or email Mykim.Navarette@sswahs.nsw.gov.au