

3-24-25 Weekly Clinical Update

In today's McKnight's Clinical Daily, there is a very interesting article titled, "Hearing Loss Raises Fall Odds by 51%, Research Shows. https://www.mcknights.com/news/hearing-loss-raises-fall-odds-by-51-percent-research-shows/?utm_source=marketing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=8NWLTR_MLT_CLINICAL_03242025&hmEmail=7n8%2FnCqJ2EkZVo%2BD7NdkWt9Sz%2By1cfMN&sha256email=fbf33a7d51f2b4dc43206e4af9c3d189a41c798606a36c9ae3a3324420aa90e5&elqTrack=True. This article is worth the time to read. (It's a short read). And within the article, it addresses the fact that hearing loss is a "modifiable risk factor". "The findings revealed that individuals with hearing loss had 51% higher odds of falls in cross-sectional studies and 17% greater risk of falls in longitudinal studies compared to those without hearing loss."

Other studies have shown that even mild hearing loss can make individuals three times more likely to experience a fall. Regular hearing checks, hearing amplification devices (preferably hearing aides and balance exercises are possible risk mitigation interventions to help reduce falls. And balance exercises should be considered for both skilled therapy and restorative nursing services. Once again, research finds that our bodies are always seeking a "homeostasis" or a balance between all the body functions.

Research shows there are four factors associated with hearing loss leading to increased fall risks:

- Balance and spatial awareness: Hearing plays a key role in maintaining balance. The inner ear, which is involved in hearing, is also part of the vestibular system that helps regulate balance. Hearing loss may interfere with this vestibular system, increasing the risk of falls.
- Environmental awareness: Hearing loss can make it harder for residents with hearing loss to detect sounds in the environment, leading to accidents.
- Cognitive Load: Straining to hear can overburden cognitive resources, leaving less mental capacity to focus on maintaining balance. This increased cognitive load can make falls more likely.
- Social Isolation: Hearing loss can lead to social withdrawal, reduced physical activity, and diminished alertness which are all factors that can increase fall risks.

Some facilities have expressed some challenges to figure out restorative nursing exercises for "balance". Here are some balance exercises to consider: (NOTE: all of these exercises should be closely supervised for the safety of the resident)

- **Head Rotations:**
 - Gently rotate head from side to side and up and down to improve neck mobility and posture.
- **Foot Taps:**
 - Tap feet one at a time to improve ankle strength and coordination.
- **Sit-to-Stands:**
 - Practice rising from a seated position, focusing on controlled movements and engaging core muscles.
- **Single-Leg Stands:**
 - Hold a stable surface for support and lift one leg off the ground, balancing on the other leg for a few seconds.
- **Heel-to-Toe Walks:**
 - Walk with the heel of one foot touching the toes of the other foot to improve balance and coordination.
- **Standing Marches:**
 - Lift knees up towards your chest while marching in place, engaging core and improving balance.
- **Over-the-Shoulder Walks:**
 - Walk while looking over one shoulder, then the other, to improve coordination and proprioception.
- **Tightrope Walks:**
 - Walk in a straight line, focusing on maintaining balance and stability.
- **Side Leg Raises:**
 - Hold onto a chair or wall for support and lift one leg out to the side, then lower it back down.
- **Clock Reach:**
 - Imagine standing in the center of a clock and reach one arm out to 12 o'clock, then 3 o'clock, 6 o'clock, and 9 o'clock, shifting weight as needed to maintain balance.
- **Rock the Boat:**
 - This exercise involves shifting weight from side to side while standing, engaging the core and improving balance.
- **Balancing Wand:**
 - Hold a cane or broomstick in the palm and try to keep it steady and upright.