From Dr. Escudé...

Causes of Falling in People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

Falling can occur for a great number of reasons. In people with IDD who have a tendency to fall, it’s important to consider both the typical causes of falls as well as some other causes that are less often noted. Below is a partial list of things to consider when someone with IDD or with a limited ability to communicate with words begins to fall:

- Arthritis– pain may not be able to be expressed verbally but may be causing difficulty in ambulation
- Seizures– seizures can present in a number of ways including increased falls
- Medications- a number of medications can be sedating, cause blood pressure to drop or affect balance that can increase the risk of falling
- Vision- poor vision may not be verbally expressed, but can cause falling if people are less able to see obstructions in their way
- Dehydration- when a person’s body fluid level is depleted, their blood pressure may drop, especially upon standing from a sitting or lying position, causing them to become weak and fall
- Hypoglycemia– when a person’s blood sugar drops, they can be at an increased risk of falling, but they may not be able to express what they are feeling
- Infection– some infections, especially a serious one like sepsis, can increase the risk of falls
- Brain conditions– a brain tumor, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s, strokes and normal pressure hydrocephalus are a few brain-related conditions that can cause falls
- Ear-related conditions– Meniere’s disease or benign paroxysmal vertigo can cause dizziness
- Aging- falls increase with age, but one should always look for reversible causes before assuming that an increasing number of falls is because of a person’s age alone
- Dementia– people with dementia are more likely to experience problems with mobility, balance and muscle weakness as well as remembering the placement of objects and finding their way around places
Preventing falls

Some simple tips to help reduce falls include:

- Review of medications that could be contributing
- Assessing for reversible health conditions
- Assessment for proper, well-fitting shoes
- Removing hazards like cords, small tables, loose rugs, clutter and spills
- Providing adequate lighting
- Installing grab bars and railing
- Using assistive devices when necessary

Thanks for your careful attention to improving the health and safety of people we support.

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Dr. Escudé has dedicated his career to providing healthcare for people with IDD and other vulnerable populations and teaches on the subject throughout the country.