



## **Don't let the Fear of Falling Debilitate You**

One in three Americans, over the age of 65, experiences a fall annually. While many are not dangerous, many lead to hospitalization and lengthy rehabilitation outside of the individual's home. And sadly, 10,000 seniors will have a fall that leads to death. The emotional and psychological consequences can almost paralyze a person from pursuing current or new activities. Rehabilitation studies have shown that once a person has experienced a fall, they may retreat from social interaction that previously added quality to their lives. Often they withdraw even from their immediate family's celebrations or shared gatherings. This disengagement leads to a 'fear cycle' of thinking that usually includes this type of self talk:

- I've experienced a non-fatal, but disruptive fall
- I must reduce my level of physical activity or outside commitments
- I know I will risk losing muscle conditioning, but I'm too afraid of falling again
- I know I may be isolating myself, but I'll just talk on the phone to keep current
- I know I should talk with my doctor or family, but I'm too embarrassed

Overcoming this 'fear cycle' is crucial to continuing a meaningful lifestyle. Gerontologists, and those in the caregiver industry, stress that open communication is the keystone to overcoming the negative self talk that stops a person from being active and safe. The first step is to recognize you are not alone in this part of your life. Talk with your family, healthcare provider or spiritual leader to plan your strategy in preventing future falls. All information about your current health status, medications that may affect your balance; and, your home structure and layout will assist you in reducing your fall risks. It may seem a huge challenge, but so is living a well-balanced life. Take it!