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Using Personal and Environmental Resources to Reduce the Risk of Falls

2009 New Investigator Research Grant

Nearly eighty-five percent of people with cognitive impairment fall each year, which is nearly double the amount compared to older adults without cognitive problems. Falling in older age can markedly change an individual's health, especially those with dementia. Falls can start a downward spiral of immobility and incapacity leading to institutionalization, and can cause premature death. Most studies on falls in older adults have excluded individuals with cognitive impairment and, therefore, little is known about how to best conduct fall prevention in people with dementia.

Lindy M. Clemson, Ph.D. and colleagues will implement a pilot program that integrates strategies for fall prevention, including methods for identifying and modifying environmental risk factors, as well as dementia-specific approaches to address safety and behavioral risk factors associated with a high risk of falling. Researchers will study community-residing people with mild to moderate dementia who have fallen in the past year along with their primary caregiver. The research team aims to develop best practices for fall prevention at home. The program will also involve training for caregivers in problem-solving strategies and general principles in reducing the risk of falls.