

Focus on Healthy Aging[®]

Maintaining Health and Vitality in Middle Age and Beyond[™]

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Are Your Hips Healthy?

Don't let a broken hip change your life. Follow these tips for prevention and, if needed, recovery.

You probably know somebody who has fallen and broken his or her hip. Each year, over 300,000 Americans are hospitalized for hip fractures, with considerable consequences.

"If you fracture your wrist, it certainly is a nuisance, and it affects certain activities of daily living. But because you're fracturing a hip, it really affects your ability to get out of bed, to walk, to get to the toilet, and the recovery from these events is usually not a day or so, but generally in the order of weeks," says Albert Siu, MD, Ellen and Howard C. Katz Professor and Chairman of Geriatrics at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

Because hip fractures have such an impact on quality of life, you should know why they happen, how to prevent them and what to do to aid your recovery if you do suffer a fracture.

What to look out for

Hip fractures usually result from what might be an insignificant fall to a younger person, like tripping over a curb or carpet. Remove

throw rugs and loose electrical cords to prevent tripping. If you are prone to falls, it's important for you and your doctor to find out why. (Look for an in-depth article on falls prevention in an upcoming issue of

Focus on Healthy Aging.) See your doctor to be sure that your vision is good and to make sure your current medications aren't making you dizzy or weak.

Certain medicines are associated with a higher risk of hip fractures, especially antipsychotics, antidepressants and sleep aids like Ambien.

Another major cause of hip fractures is osteoporosis. Women are more prone to this disease than men, especially after menopause when levels of bone-building estrogen drop off. However, men get osteoporosis too. A sixth of all men who live to be 90 have a hip fracture due to osteoporosis. To guard against osteoporosis, eat a diet rich in calcium and vitamin D. On-going studies are looking at whether low levels of vitamin D contribute to hip fractures in the elderly. Your doctor may prescribe medications to prevent additional

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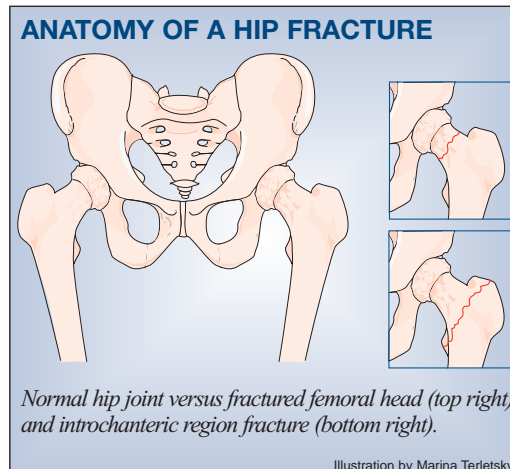


Illustration by Marina Terletsky

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bone loss. Exercise improves strength and balance and can preserve bone mass. Tai chi is one effective type of exercise program (see page 7). Walking is another easy, low-impact way to stay in shape. Be sure to always ask your doctor which activities suit your level of fitness.

Hip protectors in the form of an air-padded garment can be worn, but it's not clear exactly how well they prevent fractures. Compliance is a big issue. Many patients complain that hip protectors are hot and uncomfortable.

On the other hand, you might decide that an ounce of care could prevent a few months of rehab. "Certainly if someone is at high risk, has had multiple falls and has osteoporosis, hip protectors are something to consider after talking with your doctor," says Dr. Siu.

If prevention fails

If you fracture your hip, immediate medical attention is required. Those who have surgery within 5 days of a fracture recover better than those who wait, according to a 2004 report in the *Archives of Gerontology and*

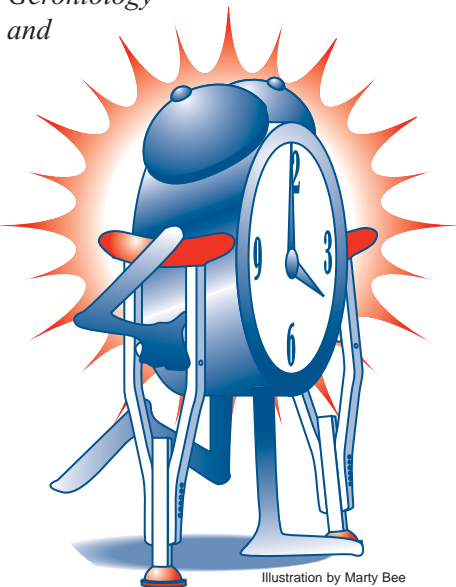


Illustration by Marty Bee

WHAT YOU CAN DO



Prevention:

- **Treat or prevent osteoporosis with diet, exercise and medications as approved by your doctor.**
- **Minimize falling risks: check your home for tripping hazards.**
- **See your doctor about any dizziness, balance or vision problems.**
- **Ask if a hip protector or physical therapy is a good idea.**

Rehabilitation:

- **Get moving: give your rehabilitation exercises your best effort.**

Geriatrics. Surgery usually involves aligning and affixing the break with pins or screws. Former President Ronald Reagan, who broke his hip after a fall in 2001, had this type of surgery. The hospital stay after surgery for a hip fracture is "on average three or four days, unless you have complications," according to Dr. Siu.

If the bone is so damaged that it can't be stabilized with conventional surgery, you may need a partial or total hip replacement.

After surgery, you will probably be prescribed an antibiotic to prevent infection and a blood thinner and compression hose to prevent potentially fatal blood clots from forming in your legs and traveling to your lungs.

The most common complication is delirium, a state of confusion that is probably caused by the stress and pain of the injury. Fortunately, "in the vast majority of cases the delirium is short-lived," says Dr. Siu.

Road to recovery

After the hospital stay, you will begin rehabilitation exercises, possi-

bly at home but more likely during a stay in a nursing facility. The rehabilitation period, which can range from two weeks to more than six, is the key to regaining your quality of life, so it deserves as much effort as you can give it.

"Hip fractures cause immobility and pain. The more that you're immobile, the more muscle you lose and the more difficult it is to recover. So it is important to get one's pain treated and to try to resume what mobility one can as early as possible through physical therapy and other assistance," Dr. Siu explains.

Many people, even those close to 90 like Reagan was when he broke his hip, can recover.

Your physical therapist will show you how much weight your healing hip can bear; how to walk with crutches, a walker or cane; ways to move to minimize pain and reinjury; and strengthening exercises.

Having just one caregiver monitor all your treatment can have the biggest impact on your rehabilitation. Your care can take place at the hospital, the rehab center and at home.

"One of the things that's very important for patients and families to do is to very carefully navigate this system to make sure they have someone involved who can make sure the ball is not dropped through the various transitions," says Dr. Siu. Your primary care doctor is probably the best person for this task.

Bottom line? Protect your hips by treating osteoporosis if you have it, or preventing it with a good diet and exercise approved by your doctor. Look out for hazards that might cause a fall.

If you do break your hip, good pain management and rehabilitation are the keys to regaining your mobility. ■