

# A Holistic Approach to Addressing Falls in Older Adults during a Pandemic

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## Background:

- Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in early 2020, many older adults have had to limit their community engagement as a result of Stay-at-Home orders within their local communities.
- Due to the increased risks posed by COVID-19 in aging populations, many of the community-based resources that serve older adults have been limiting in person activities and services.
- All of this has culminated in many older adults experiencing increased social isolation, decreased access to healthcare providers and decreased physical activity, all of which can increase the risk of falls.
- Loss or lack of essential in-home services that help older adults with instrumental activities of daily living such as home management and cleaning and meal preparation leave additional risks for falls within the home.
- Finally, aging resources have found that older adults are at an increased risk of falls while receiving meal and package deliveries at their homes.

## Role of Occupational Therapy

- Occupational therapists can address multifactorial risk factors for falls post-COVID through telehealth by providing suggestions for home modifications, instrumental activities of daily living and package delivery that older adults can easily implement on their own. By engaging with the older adult and their family members and/or caregivers, occupational therapists can additionally address the social isolation that may occur from COVID-19.

Evidence suggests that older adults will experience an increase in falls resulting from increased social isolation, decreased physical activity, and decreased community integration as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated stay-at-home orders. These risks can be mitigated through a *holistic* approach including participation in virtual fall prevention programs, engagement in exercise and meaningful occupations, suggestions for home modifications and improvements for safety when receiving deliveries at home.



Contact NGFFC at [nvgoesfallsfreecoalition@gmail.com](mailto:nvgoesfallsfreecoalition@gmail.com) for information on Fall Prevention resources

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## Multifactorial Fall Prevention Strategies

- Evidence-based, multifactorial fall prevention programs are currently available through virtual options. In Nevada, these currently include *Tai Ji Quan Moving For Better Balance* and also offered this spring will be *Stepping On*.
- Best practice and experience has identified that older adults benefit from an initial set up and 1:1 training session to review technology use, set up of cameras and how to utilize features such as chat, mute and raise hand.
- Social isolation is combatted through weekly workshop sessions that include interaction with facilitator and peers.
- Home exercise programs and suggestions for activity engagement can be provided to increase physical activity, improve balance, and mitigate the negative effects of decreased community engagement.

## Strategies for Meal and Package Delivery

- With an increase in meal and package delivery to older adults' homes, there has been an increase in falls while trying to bring items into the home.
- Recommendations to increase safety and prevent falls include placing a table outside the door and ask for items to be left on it. This reduces the need to bend over to pick up items.
- For flat entry ways, place a metal cart or rolling chair for items to be placed on. This way they can be easily rolled into the house. Older adults who require a walker for mobility can also place smaller packages in a basket or on the seat to roll them into the house.

## Strategies for Home Modifications

- Recommendations to improve safety within the home can be made by an occupational therapist to help prevent falls. Family members can be asked to assist with making changes as needed.
- Remove rugs and clutter within walkways.
- Increase lighting within the home; motion activated lights are beneficial especially at night.
- Utilize assistive devices as recommended. Consider installing grab bars in the bathroom