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Patient Anxiety Related to Falls

When identifying the reasons an elderly patient falls, there may be a number of variables that contribute. It can be normal life changes, such as decreased eyesight or hearing, or it may be related to medication. Another cause of falls can actually be an elderly person's fear of falling. This fear can exacerbate underlying physical conditions that can lead to a greater risk of falling.

In a new study from the Neurological Hospital and Health Center of the Ludwig Maximilians University in Germany, they have found that elderly individuals who are afraid of falling typically restrict their own movement, which then worsens the physical conditions they may have. This can lead to a greater risk of falls. The prevalence of anxiety related gait disturbances in elderly patients could be as high as 85%, according to the report.

The prevalence of gait disturbance is 35% in persons over the age of 70. When treating gait disturbances it is important to identify the underlying cause of the disturbance and design any therapies to that cause. According to an article in the *Deutsches Ärzteblatt International*, gait disturbances in the elderly are often of multifactorial origin. The relevant pathogenetic factors include sensory deficits (visual, vestibular, somatosensory), neurodegenerative processes (cortical, extrapyramidal motor, cerebellar), toxic factors (medications, alcohol), and anxiety (primary or concerning falls).

References

"Fear not. Anxiety over falling can lead to more falls, researchers find." McKnight's. *McKnight's Long-Term Care News and Assisted Living*. May 17, 2010. June 4, 2010

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