Are you afraid of falling?
Impact and management of fear of falling

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Fear of falling

- “Psychological trauma associated with falling”
- Realistic or unrealistic
- Adaptive or maladaptive?

“a lasting concern about falling that leads to an individual avoiding activities that he/she remains capable of performing.”

(Tinetti et al, 1990 Tinetti & Powell, 1993)
Fear of falling: common

• In older people
  – 20-85% prevalence
  – People who have fallen
  – People who haven’t fallen
  – Women
  – Increases with age


A vicious cycle?

- Fall
- Increased risk of falling
- Activity restriction
- Functional impairment
- Fear of falling

FES-I: long and short

http://www.profane.eu.org/fesi.html

Icon FES

FOF is associated with....

- Falls
- Balance
- Gait
- Functional ability
- Activity restriction
- Personality
- Psychological state e.g. anxiety/depression
- Female gender
- Increasing age


Fear of falling and falls

Clear associations in the literature between

- Fear of falling/ falls efficacy and previous falls
- Fear of falling/efficacy and future falls

• (Arfken et al 1994, Lachmann 1998)

BUT......

- What is the causality???
- Very few longitudinal studies
Fear of falling & gait/balance

- Reduced gait speed
- Reduced step length
- Increased step width
- Increased double support phase
- Postural stiffening strategy?
  - Age, disease dependent
- Adjustments normal, but FOF heightens adjustment

Donoghue et al 2013; Shaw et al 2012; Delbaere et al 2009

The challenge of management

- Limited research targeting FOF directly
- FOF usually a secondary outcome in falls prevention/exercise trials
- What should be targeted?
  - Psychological factors
  - Physical factors
  - Falls risk factors
  - All factors
FALLS

Risk factors for falls:
- Vision problems
- Sensory problems
- Demographics

Appraisal of one's abilities:
- realistic
- unrealistic

Balance performance

Falls efficacy

Fear of falling
Anxiety

Other contributors to fear/avoidance:
- Previous falls
- Beliefs
- Personality/perception/cognition
- Social supports

Deconditioning

Activity avoidance or restriction

The message
- Assess fear of falling
- Context is important
- Identify individuals at risk of activity restriction
- Intervention if needed

Adapted from Hadjistavropoulos et al 2011