

# Fractures in the elderly: How to rebuild strength

Simple lifestyle changes can help seniors heal well and stay independent after recovery, says Mount Alvernia orthopaedic surgeon Teo Yee Hong

Ageing brings gradual body changes, but some have a bigger impact than we realise. Bones that were once strong become more fragile, making falls far riskier. For the elderly, what might have been a harmless stumble in the past can now lead to a serious fracture, months of recovery and long-term loss of mobility. Fractures can also bring a deep fear of falling again, causing seniors to move less – in turn making them even weaker and more prone to falls.

However, with the right care and fall prevention measures, they can recover confidently and stay independent, says Mount Alvernia Hospital orthopaedic surgeon Teo Yee Hong. He explains how the elderly can heal and protect themselves better.

## Q What are the common causes of fractures in the elderly and which bones are at risk?

Apart from age, osteoporosis often makes the elderly more vulnerable to fractures. This condition gradually reduces bone density and strength, leaving bones brittle and more likely to break. Many seniors do not realise they have the disease until they suffer their first fracture.

Bones at risk include a weakened spine, which can fracture from the force of a cough or sneeze; the wrist, often injured when trying to break a fall; and the hip, the most serious injury that frequently requires surgery and long-term rehabilitation.

Muscle weakness, slower reflexes and poor balance also make it harder to recover from a slip. Meanwhile, deteriorating vision can make obstacles more difficult to spot, thus increasing the risk of trips and falls.

Medications that cause drowsiness, fatigue or cognitive decline can also affect balance. At home, slippery floors, loose rugs, dimmed lighting and cluttered spaces can turn routine movements into potential hazards for seniors whose stability is already compromised.



Simple habits, such as using a walking aid, can safely support seniors as they heal from fractures. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

## Q What does recovery from a fracture look like and how can healing be improved?

The elderly typically takes around three months to recover from a fracture, depending on the severity or type of injury. For some, surgery may be necessary to stabilise the fracture and improve long-term function.

Healing also requires rebuilding strength and confidence to reduce the risk of future falls. Good nutrition, including adequate calcium and vitamin D, supports bone health, while physical therapy, such as weight-bearing exercises and resistance training, helps restore mobility, improve balance and prevent muscle loss. Caregivers play a key role in ensuring seniors get the nutrition, exercise and treatment they need while assisting them in daily tasks to support their recovery.

## Q What steps can the elderly take to prevent falls and reduce their risk of fractures?

Clearing walkways, improving lighting, and installing non-slip surfaces, grab bars and handrails can make movement around the home safer. Extra support in bathrooms and stairways is especially important to prevent slips.

Caring for one's body is just as crucial. Use a walking aid when needed, and have regular eye check-ups to detect vision changes that make obstacles harder to see. Ensure ample rest, especially after taking medications that cause drowsiness. Simple habits – moving mindfully, avoiding rushing and wearing non-slip footwear – can also reduce the risk of falls.



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