

HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

Keep on walking, just watch your step

By ELAINE HESSER

‘STAY ACTIVE,’ they said. “It’ll be fun,” they said. Until someone falls and breaks a hip. Fortunately, there’s plenty you can do to stay safe while enjoying the beach, the mountains of Big Sur, or just an afternoon at home with the family. Although the suggestions in this story are aimed at more mature readers, many of them are useful to people of all ages.

Lorraine Artinger, a registered nurse and a trauma injury prevention coordinator at Natividad Medical Center in Salinas, said that after victims of motor vehicle crashes, the largest group of patients they see in the hospital’s trauma center are people who’ve been injured in falls, and 70 percent of them are 65 years or older. Most, if not all, of those falls are preventable.



Dr. Pablo Veliz

Pablo Veliz is a primary care physician with Montage Medical Group as well as the medical director for Carmel Valley Manor. He said his first recommendation for people to avoid injuries is to stay physically active — something you can start at any age.

Veliz said that yoga, Pilates and tai chi are all good ways to build balance, strength and flexibility. Building muscle also slows bone loss, which

is often problematic for women. The Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization estimate that about a third of postmenopausal women have osteoporosis, with bones that can break easily.

He added that yoga classes at Carmel Valley Manor have attendees in their late 90s and early 100s. Veliz recommends group classes because they create accountability and decrease isolation, which studies have shown correlates strongly with dementia.

“Any movement is good movement,” said Veliz, but with movement, comes risk. To stay safe, he recommended regular checkups. These are good opportunities to go over your medications, too.

Said Artinger, “Have your healthcare provider or



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Exercise classes like this one in Carmel Valley encourage community and accountability while making sure participants are safe.

pharmacist review your medications, including over-the-counter medications,” since many drugs — alone or in combination — can make people dizzy or sleepy, which increases the risk of falling. “Have your vision and feet checked yearly,” she said. Veliz noted that regular hearing exams can help make sure people stay alert to what’s going on around them, too.

Eat, drink, sleep, repeat

Adequate sleep is necessary to staying aware of your surroundings, whether you’re walking or behind the wheel. Veliz said for most people, six to eight hours is the

sweet spot, but some people can get by on as few as five or need as much as 10 hours nightly. Others might require a midday nap. “The important thing is that you wake up feeling restored,” he said.

Good nutrition and hydration can prevent a host of problems. Veliz spoke to Healthy Lifestyles during our annual heat wave and mentioned that he was concerned for his elderly patients and hoped that they were drinking plenty of water. People’s thirst becomes a less reliable indicator of the need for water as they age, so staying hydrat-

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becoming more serious. “Treatments have been shown to be up to 88 percent effective at preventing serious illness, hospitalization, and death” from Covid, says the CDPH website.

It adds that early evidence suggests treatment may lower the risk of long Covid symptoms, which can drag on for weeks or months after the infection clears. Medications may also help people test negative sooner.

Annual ritual

Finally, what of RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus, which was in the news over the summer? The CDC describes it as a “common respiratory virus that usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms,” but can

be serious in older adults and infants.

A vaccine has been approved for RSV and is available locally. It’s recommended for adults 60 and older, those who have severe lung diseases or other underlying conditions and infants. The CDC says it should also be administered to those who are between 32 and 36 weeks pregnant, as the immunity will be passed on to their babies.

Experts say you should think of the annual shots as a fall ritual for grownups, akin to buying school supplies or registering for college classes. If you have questions, ask your doctor. Then, when you see the “free vaccines” sign outside your drugstore, take advantage. If Mr. Twitterhead’s screaming in your social media feed, just ignore him. Unlike smallpox, he simply won’t go away.

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ed requires some thought.

Wine doesn’t count toward hydration, but Veliz said alcohol is OK in moderation for most people. Just bear in mind that impairment can be a factor in falls and other accidents.

Once you’ve looked at your physical health, evaluate the way your home is set up.

Veliz noted that older people sometimes need to use the bathroom more frequently, so making sure the route there is safe and well-lighted is helpful. And, Artinger said, “Use non-slip mats in the bathtub and on the shower floor. Have grab bars installed next to and inside the shower, and next to the toilet.” Veliz added a shower chair to that list of suggestions, and said that throw rugs and bath mats should also be nonslip, if you use them. They look pretty, but it’s easy to catch a toe on the edge of a rug and go flying.

Good lighting isn’t just for the bath-

room. Both the doctor and Artinger said to make sure you can see clearly throughout the house, and remove anything you might trip over. Artinger listed “papers, books, clothes and shoes” among things frequently left lying around on the floor.

When you’re cooking, don’t use high heat or try to carry too many things at once. Slower reflexes mean that older adults need a little more time to react, so take your time and focus on what you’re doing — watch for things like hot pot handles, for example.

Artinger also said, “Keep items you use often in cabinets you can reach easily without straining to reach or using a step stool.” That’s good advice throughout the home.

Shoes matter

People’s skin also thins with age. Burns, cuts and bruises are bad enough when you’re young, but they are more dangerous for older people whose skin tears

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