

Mark Harris, County Executive  
Doug Gieryn, Director/Health Officer

Office Hours: M-F 8:00am-4:30pm  
Toll-Free: 800-250-3110  
Fax: 920-232-3370

[health@co.winnebago.wi.us](mailto:health@co.winnebago.wi.us)  
[www.winnebagohealth.org](http://www.winnebagohealth.org)



112 Otter Avenue  
Oshkosh, WI 54903-2808  
Phone: 920-232-3000

211 N Commercial Street  
Neenah, WI 54956  
Phone: 920-727-2894

Find us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)  
[@WinnebagoHealth](#)

**Date:** 9/1/2017

**Subject:** Falls Prevention Awareness

**Contact:** Barb Wolf

**P:** 920-232-3000

**E:** [bwolf@co.winnebago.wi.us](mailto:bwolf@co.winnebago.wi.us)

## **Avoiding Falls Means Honest Talk and New Skills for Older Adults**

September Named Fall Prevention Awareness Month in Wisconsin

Falls may not seem an obvious topic for a casual gathering of active older adults. But mention the subject, and it quickly takes center stage. For one person, it's the story of an older relative whose fear of falling keeps them homebound. For another, it's their worry about a spouse who won't admit that falling has become a problem. No matter the variety of personal experiences, however, everyone will agree: older adults don't want to become a fall-injury statistic.

And their concern is well placed. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that falls are by far the most common cause of accidental injury for older adults in the US. Each year, 2.3 million adults over 65 has a fall, leading to serious injuries in about 1 in 3 cases. At a local level, the picture is even more grim. If you are over 65, just living in Wisconsin increases your risk of dying from an accidental fall by more than twice the national average, according to recent CDC data. Icy winters and the state's high standards for tracking fall-related injuries don't fully explain the startling statistic. Public health experts say that's made it difficult to address the causes of the disparity. In Winnebago County, 314 people over 65 were hospitalized and 1,416 went to the emergency room due to a fall from 2013 through 2014.

Beyond the scary numbers, however, there's another side to falls that older adults need to know. "Falls are preventable and they are not a normal part of aging," says Betsy Abramson of the Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging. Abramson's organization supports training and research for falls prevention programs in Wisconsin communities, including a class called Stepping On. "Studies in Wisconsin have shown Stepping On reduced participants' likelihood of falling by as much as 50% after taking the class. That's a lot of bruises, or even more serious injuries that people avoided. It very good news because it shows older adults there are effective ways to protect themselves from falls."

"Nobody wants to fall," says Barbara Wolf, Public Health Nurse helps coordinate Stepping On for Winnebago County. "People want to be proactive, but they need to know how to recognize their risk in the first place. Classes like Stepping On make people aware of hazards they take for granted at home or out in the community. Instead of scaring them, though, Stepping On puts the problem-solving in their hands."

Peggy Marler, an Oshkosh resident who participated in the Stepping On class during fall of 2016, found the class beneficial for reasons other than just learning about physical health and gaining strength. "I just moved to

For public relations and media concerns contact WCHD's Communication Specialist:  
Alana Erickson, [aerickson@co.winnebago.wi.us](mailto:aerickson@co.winnebago.wi.us) or 920-232-3352

Oshkosh and didn't know anyone," Marler said. "This was a great opportunity to meet people and to learn something new about fall prevention."

Stepping On workshops meet once a week for 7 weeks, to give participants a chance to hear from community safety experts like pharmacists and vision specialists, as well as build strength with the supervision of a physical therapist. "It's also a wonderful social opportunity for participants. Members support each other during class and often walk away with many new relationships." says Wolf.

The Stepping On class is designed for those 55+ and is for anyone looking to learn more about the risks and steps to prevent falls. Currently we have classes set up for Oshkosh and Menasha, allowing you to find the right fit for your schedule. To register for this class or for more information, contact Judy at 920-232-3000. *Learn more about Stepping On and find workshops in communities throughout Wisconsin by visiting [wihealthyaging.org](http://wihealthyaging.org). The Winnebago County Wellness Coalition holds many evidence based classes to support healthy aging- find a full list at <https://www.co.winnebago.wi.us/health/divisions-program-areas/your-health/adult/healthy-aging>* We're always looking for new partners to expand our locations – if you would like to teach or host a class through your organization contact Joanne Murphy Spice at 232-3006