

## Stay Independent and Active for Life

Arvon Anderson says he's a firm believer in physical therapy, having benefitted from it in the past for shoulder and hip problems. He's even been able to avoid surgery due to physical therapy. So when recent chemotherapy treatments made his legs weak, resulting in several falls and difficulty walking, he turned to Kitsap Physical Therapy and Sports Clinics (KPT).

After six weeks of working with Jarel Bakke, DPT (Doctor of Physical Therapy) a Geriatric Specialist at KPT, Anderson regained his confidence to walk.

"We worked on strengthening my legs and arms after cancer treatment so I could stand," Anderson says. "It helped me with my stability. Jarel helped me a lot and I would recommend him to anyone."

Leg weakness is common in older adults, and it's a major contributor to falls. About 25 percent of adults ages 65 and older suffer from falls, and about a quarter of those falls result in injuries.

- **Two thirds of seniors who experience a fall will fall again within six months.**
- **1 in 3 people aged 65 years and older fall at least once every year. 1 in 40 of those will be hospitalized and only half of those hospitalized will survive the year.**
- **60% of fatal falls occur in the home.**

You can help prevent falls with physical therapy while also addressing risk factors that may impact balance. Kitsap Physical Therapy's fall-prevention program takes a holistic approach that combines physical therapy with education about those risk factors.

A PT can perform functional tests to assess the patient's strength and balance, and then designs a personalized treatment plan. This plan includes functional exercises to strengthen the leg muscles, as well as other activities, such as walking, getting out of a chair and building cardiovascular endurance.

"We try to incorporate the exercises into daily life. We want to simulate real life because that's what the patients need to get back to," Bakke says.

Bakke says that poor proprioception, the brain's ability to integrate sensory information from receptors in joints,

can also contribute to falls. This is common in older adults because nerve function slows with age, but proprioception can be improved with the appropriate exercises.

Other factors that the KPT physical therapists address include vision screening — making sure the patient has a current exam and prescription and directing them to an optometrist if needed— as well as assessing the home environment. Rugs on the floor, poor lighting and roaming pets are all things that can be addressed to help prevent falls.

"We want to talk about what else may be going on in your environment that may be contributing to falls," Bakke says.

Medication can be another contributor to falls. "If you're on five or more medications, talk to your doctor or pharmacist to make sure that's not affecting your balance," Bakke says.

The fall-prevention program is part of Kitsap Physical Therapy's program for older adults. Currently, three PTs are working on becoming certified geriatric specialists, earned after completing a nine-month educational curriculum.

"We want to give people the tools to enjoy their life. If their balance is impaired, that significantly affects their ability to get out and do things they want to do," Bakke says. "We want to work with each person and figure out how we can use exercises and other strategies to help you age better and enjoy life."

In collaboration with the Kitsap County Fall Prevention Coalition KPT will be the first organization to offer SAIL classes (Stay Active and Independent for Life) in the county.

SAIL is an evidence-based fall-prevention class for adults 65 and older that helps improve strength, balance and cardiovascular fitness. Its goal is to keep adults active and reduce their chances of falling.

Classes will be conducted two or three times a week by PTs and PTAs (Physical Therapist Assistants) who specialize in geriatrics and are SAIL-certified instructors. The class is designed to help increase energy, improve walking and flexibility, maintain healthy weight, and improve self-image and sleep. It uses a group approach, providing a social environment where peers interact and can create new relationships.

KPT has geriatric specialist at the Bainbridge, Bremerton, Kingston and both Poulsbo clinic locations. For more program or SAIL class information, visit [www.kitsappt.com](http://www.kitsappt.com).

## Ask Yourself These Questions...

Circle "Yes" or "No" for each statement below

- Yes (2) No (0) I have fallen in the past year.
- Yes (2) No (0) I use or have been advised to use a cane or walker to get around safely.
- Yes (2) No (0) Sometimes I feel unsteady when I am walking.
- Yes (2) No (0) I steady myself by holding onto furniture when walking at home.
- Yes (2) No (0) I am worried about falling.
- Yes (2) No (0) I need to push with my hands to stand up from a chair.
- Yes (2) No (0) I have some trouble stepping up onto a curb.
- Yes (2) No (0) I often have to rush to the toilet.
- Yes (2) No (0) I have lost some feeling in my feet.
- Yes (2) No (0) I take medicine that sometimes makes me feel light-headed or more tired than usual.
- Yes (2) No (0) I take medicine to help me sleep or improve my mood.
- Yes (2) No (0) I often feel sad or depressed.

Total \_\_\_\_\_

Add up the number of points for each "yes" answer. If you scored 4 points or more, you may be at risk. Contact one of KPT's geriatric specialists with your results for a FREE screening and recommendation to help you stay independent and active for life.

This checklist was developed by the Greater Los Angeles VA Geriatric Research Education Clinical Center and affiliates and is a validated fall risk self-assessment tool (Rubenstein et al. J Safety Res; 2011: 42(6)493-499). Adapted with permission of the authors.

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