

[IMAGE]

## Hip-Hip-Hooray!

A hip fracture, generally caused by a fall, is one of the most serious injuries elderly people face. Nursing home residents have a particularly high risk for these fractures, which often lead to extreme immobility and even death, despite corrective surgery for most sufferers. Wearing external hip protectors can reduce the impact of a fall, significantly lowering the odds for a hip fracture - but regular use of hip protectors is low.

To evaluate hip-protector usage following an educational intervention, almost 1,000 nursing home residents 70 or more years old and at a high risk for falling participated in a recent study published in the *British Medical Journal*. Staff at selected nursing homes in Hamburg, Germany, were educated about hip protector use in a single class, then instructed the residents and supplied them with hip protectors. Elderly patients provided with standard care were examined for comparison.

Over 18 months, the risk for hip fracture was reduced by 43% in seniors given free hip protectors and education about their usage, compared to their peers. Of those seniors who suffered a fall, hip protectors were used by 15% of people receiving standard care, versus 68% in the group given hip protectors and education.

This study may be cause for celebration. Some consider external hip protectors cumbersome and unsightly, but if you're a likely candidate for a hip fracture, they provide a safe, easy means of avoiding what can be a severe injury. Seniors who should consider wearing hip protectors are those with any of the following criteria: female gender; slight build; osteoporosis; poor balance or coordination; vision problems; general disorientation; or medication use that leads to dizziness or a weakened condition.

### *Reference:*

Meyer G, Warnke A, et al. Effect on hip fractures of increased use of hip protectors in nursing homes: Cluster randomized controlled trial. *British Medical Journal* 2003;326, pp. 76-80.

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