

Saint Anthony's Health Center offers free balance screening

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**SAINT ANTHONY'S
HEALTH CENTER**

ALTON - For many people, dizziness and the fear of frequent falls severely affects their overall quality of life. To help people gain control of their balance, OSF Saint Anthony's Health Center is offering a free balance screening on Thursday, April 6.

The screenings start at 1:00 PM at the Occupational Therapy Balance Center of OSF Saint Clare's Medical Office Building. To register, visit www.osfsaintanthon.org, and click on View Classes & Events. For information, call (618) 465-2264.

It is estimated that nearly 50 percent of people age 65 and over experience falls, with the majority experiencing repeated falls.

“Falls are the leading cause of injury in older adults and deterioration of one’s balance is a major cause,” said Kelly Bogowith, Clinical Lead Therapist at OSF Saint Anthony’s Health Center. “A balance screening can be helpful in determining your risk factors for falling, and get you involved in a therapy program that’s right for you.”

The risk for falls increases if a person has muscle weakness, a history of falls, suffers from chronic illnesses or has been hospitalized with an acute illness, has foot or vision problems, or is on multiple medications.

For 92 year old Pauline Dunlap of Alton, arthritis made moving painful and the threat of a fall a reality. She participated in an OSF balance screening, and says she would recommend it to anyone.

“They were very kind, and the screening made me feel good both physically and mentally,” said Dunlap. “It will remind you that people are still caring.”

In a study published in *Stroke: Journal of the American Heart Association*, women stroke survivors who reported difficulty maintaining their balance while dressing were seven times more likely to fall than women who didn’t report balance problems. Overall balance problems, dizziness or a “spinning” sensation as the result of stroke were associated with a five-fold increase in risk of falls. People with balance problems often benefit from physical therapy and occupational therapy.

Individuals who have a fear of falling or who experience vertigo and unsteadiness are encouraged to attend. OSF Saint Anthony’s therapy professionals will help identify and modify risk factors for falls, such as strength and balance challenges, home hazards and health-related issues.

To avoid falls at home, here are some safety items to check:

- Are throw rugs eliminated or fastened down?
- Are all electrical cords out of the pathway and not under rugs or carpets?
- Are non-slip mats placed in bathtubs and showers?
- Is there a raised toilet seat installed?
- Are there banisters or railings along stairways?
- Are stairways, pathways, and bathrooms well lit?
- Are stairs, halls, and doorways free of clutter?
- Are all steps and sidewalks clear of tools, toys, and other articles?