What You Need to Know About Fall Recovery and Osteoporosis

by ANGELA FINLAY

How to Move Through Fall Recovery and Emerge With a Stronger Body

A nasty fall sure is painful, but the damage done can be much more serious than the discomfort. When your bones are already vulnerable to fracture, hitting the ground can cause a break more easily than you might imagine, and healing and fall recovery can stretch out for months.

However, your road to fall recovery can be shorter, more comfortable and even empowering if you take some proactive steps towards healing and strengthening. Regardless of the extent of your osteoporosis, you can help your body to bounce back after a damaging fall.

Healing the Break During Fall Recovery

Typically, a broken bone will need to be kept straight and immobile while it heals in order to fuse together correctly. That's fine in theory, but in practice it can make things difficult for you.

Living With a Cast

If you have broken a bone in your hand or foot, it is likely you will have a cast applied and mobility will almost certainly become an issue. Rather than pushing your body through the pain, it is important to adjust your lifestyle to account for the cast or splint.

Spinal injuries may require a therapeutic brace or corset to keep the spine steady while you heal, and that can dramatically decrease your regular range of motion.

Here are some good tips to help you get through your time with your cast during fall recovery:

- Unless your foot cast is designed for walking, don't put your bodyweight on it.
- Keep swelling down by propping up the limb when sitting, and consider taking NSAIDs.
- Practice toning the muscles around and under the cast with physio-approved exercises.

Patience is a Virtue

A cast or splint is usually worn for at least six weeks, but perhaps a break can take significantly longer to heal depending on the bone and the nature of the fracture. For instance, a wrist, when immobilized and gradually strengthened, can be better in less than eight weeks.

On the other hand, a vertebral fracture in the spine can take longer to mend, since it is more difficult to keep still, and a hip fracture requiring surgery can take several months to heal enough for you to walk comfortably.

Listen to your doctor and your body. While there are guidelines for healing a break, there is no absolute timeline

because everyone is different. If you are feeling pain and fatigue, these are signs that you might be pushing your body too hard.

Regaining Strength

You can begin regaining your strength during fall recovery before the cast comes off, with the right help. A rehabilitation program is generally the first step after surgery or setting of the bone. This is sometimes held in the hospital, or perhaps in another clinical atmosphere where targeted mobility and strengthening exercises are led by doctors and therapists who specialize in recovery.

Continuing Your Rehabilitation

Rehab and recovery under medical supervision is important, but your improvement will grind to a halt if you don't keep up the strengthening on your own.

Hip fractures are among the most common osteoporosis-related injuries, and while they can be difficult to heal, a study out of Boston University found that patients recovering from hip surgery who did specific exercises at home enjoyed significantly more function and mobility.

How Yoga Can Help

Along with rebuilding muscle, you will want to focus on improving your balance. After all, weakened muscles and bones make slips more likely, which increases your risk of major damage.

Beginning a gentle Hatha yoga routine could be your best bet for better balance: you can eliminate the powerful postures and instead use slow and deliberate movements to nurture your balance in both sides of your body. Find a yoga instructor who has experience with rehabilitation and can offer close and careful guidance through your practice.

Learning From Your Fall

Once you have had a bad fall, you will naturally be a bit more cautious. You might be reluctant to go out in bad weather, or cover longer distances on your own.

However, strengthening muscles and improving your cardiovascular fitness are vital parts of the rehabilitation process and will absolutely improve your longevity, so whatever you do, don't swear off exercise.

Instead of staying immobile, look into other possible problems that may be increasing your risk of falling. You might find that simple adjustments to your health and lifestyle can bring back a lot of stability.

Revisit Your Medication

Common medications can impact with everything from blood pressure to sleep cycle, and their side effects can put you at greater risk for a stumble. Read the description, instructions and possible side effects of each medication closely, and if you suspect that one or more might be interfering with your balance or alertness, it is time to check in with your doctor about alternatives to consider.

Have Your Eyes and Ears Checked

Most people feel the effects of aging in various areas, and it is really no big deal — these may be challenges, but they certainly don't have to change the way you live and enjoy your life.

On the other hand, it is your responsibility to keep up with the changes in your body for the sake of your health and safety. Be sure to visit the doctor at regular intervals for eyesight and hearing tests, since these senses can degrade very gradually, and you might not be able to tell just how much function you have lost until you have an

accident.

Work With an Occupational Therapist

The best medical treatment will combine a variety of health professionals: an osteopath for in-depth knowledge of bone health, a physiotherapist for physical pain relief and recovery strategies and other knowledgeable people to help round out your rehabilitation.

After your initial treatment, an occupational therapist can help get you on a better track to a safer and more comfortable life at home and at work. OTs have an arsenal of techniques that make repetitive tasks simpler and certain actions more accessible if you have a mobility issue, from clever assistive devices to new ways to manage your household chores. Your doctor may be your number one ally, but don’t dismiss the power of a good OT.