Fall prevention interventions in primary care to reduce fractures and falls in people aged 70 years and over: the PreFIT three-arm cluster RCT

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Plain English summary

What is the problem?

Falls are a major problem for older people. Current practice is to give people advice leaflets. Another approach is exercise, especially balance and strength training. A third alternative is to invite older people to attend a falls assessment with a health-care professional, either a doctor or a trained nurse. This usually involves a careful check of prescribed tablets, blood pressure, eyesight and other problems that might cause falls.

What did we do?

We compared three strategies. We recruited 9803 people aged 70–101 years from 63 general practices across England. We randomly allocated practices in clusters into three treatment groups. The participants in one group were given a Staying Steady advice leaflet (Age UK. Staying Steady, London: Age UK; 2009). Participants in the second group received the same leaflet and were assessed to see if they were at higher risk of falling. Those participants identified as being at higher risk (about 1000 people) were invited to take part in an exercise programme, supported by an exercise therapist. These people did balance and strength training at home for up to 6 months. In the third group, we again identified participants who were at higher risk of falling (about 1000 people) and invited them for a detailed falls assessment with a trained nurse or doctor. This last group of participants were referred for other treatments if any health problems were found. In all groups we counted fractures and falls and measured changes in quality of life, frailty and the cost of the treatments over 18 months of follow-up.

What did we find out?

We found no difference in the number of fractures over 18 months between the different treatments. The exercise programme reduced falls in the short term but not over the longer term. The exercise programme was cheaper and led to a slightly better overall quality of life.
Criteria for inclusion in the Health Technology Assessment journal

Reports are published in Health Technology Assessment (HTA) if (1) they have resulted from work for the HTA programme, and (2) they are of a sufficiently high scientific quality as assessed by the reviewers and editors.

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This report

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