

# Greenwich Time

## Greenwich seniors lead a balanced life to prevent falls

By Lisa Chamoff  
Staff Writer

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After a stroke left her paralyzed on her left side several years ago, Doris Harrington of Old Greenwich went through rehabilitation, but was still feeling a little unsteady on her feet.

At a recent class at Greenwich Hospital's Center for Healthy Living, Harrington, 84, walked backward and stood on a rubber ball that had been cut in half and mounted on a flat platform.

In the middle of a 12-week class designed to increase seniors' balance, Harrington said she was walking with more confidence.

"My daughters think my posture is better and I know I'm lifting my feet a bit more," Harrington said.

The class, which the center has been offering for the past few years, helps older residents increase muscle strength and walk with awareness, with an eye on preventing debilitating falls, one of the most common causes of injury among older adults. The class includes lectures, drills and exercises on balance equipment.

Among adults 70 years and older, 3 in 10 fall each year, according to the Connecticut Collaboration for Fall Prevention. Falls cause more than 90 percent of broken hips.

The result of a fall can be worse than a broken bone. If a senior falls and fractures their hip, they have a greater chance of developing other medical problems like pneumonia, said Dr. Linda Grant, the

director of physical medicine and rehabilitation at Greenwich Hospital.

Richard Becker, an exercise physiologist who teaches at the Center for Healthy Living, said the class wakes up the muscles and also helps people get over nervousness when walking or negotiating stairs.

The class also gets seniors to walk faster, which helps build confidence, and teaches them techniques, such as taking wide steps, lifting up the legs and counting steps to maintain a connection between the mind and body.

While the hospital hasn't done any research into how effective the class has been at preventing falls, Becker wants to develop a questionnaire for the next series of classes, which begin in September, to assess how comfortable the participants feel doing certain activities, such as stepping up on a curb, before and after the class.

Grant said the program is helpful for people who have finished a rehabilitation program and need more help maintaining balance.

"It helps the patients have the ability to remain independent and do their normal activities," Grant said.

Rye, N.Y., resident Audrey Mechcatie said she's learned the proper way to reach for objects on high shelves, by swinging the foot to maintain balance.

"You become a bit of a ballerina, said Mechcatie, 80.

Mechcatie recently had problems with her ears that caused dizziness, and the classes have helped.

"That is a world of difference," Mechcatie said. "You

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don't fear a thing."

The class is free for members and \$175 for nonmembers. For more information, call the Center for Healthy Living at (203) 863-3756.

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