



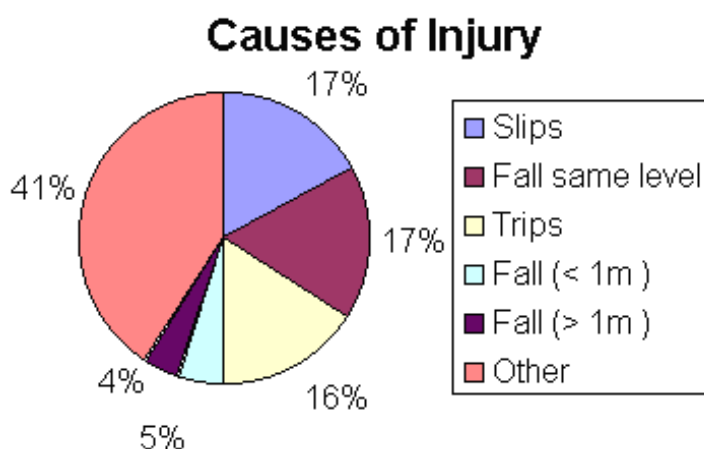
INJURY

BULLETIN

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FALLS IN THE ELDERLY

Nearly 60% of all injuries sustained by people 65 years and over are caused by a slip, trip or fall.



Contributing Factors:

Within this age group there are many different factors that contribute to falls, some working interactively. They can be divided into three broad categories:

1. People Risk Factors - These may be acute or chronic medical conditions and/or the medications used to treat them and the effect they have on the individual's functioning.

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* QISU data is based on emergency department presentations to the following hospitals: Mater Children's Hospital, Mater Adult Hospital, Mater Private Emergency Care Centre, Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Hospital, Redland Hospital, Logan Hospital, Royal Children's Hospital, Mt Isa Hospital and Mackay and district hospitals.

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Nursing home victims of a fall were reported as being a precipitating factor themselves in 63% of cases, compared to 36% of victims falling in their own home.

2. Activity Related Factors - Around 3% of falls occurred while the person was standing on a chair or ladder and occupied in home maintenance such as curtain hanging or window cleaning.

3. Environmental Factors - The most common general location for a fall in this age group was in the person's own home, more specifically in the living or sleeping area. Steps and stairs are the single most significant factor and outside steps and stairs appear more hazardous than internal stairs. They are associated with 30% of falls occurring in the external home environment.

Other factors commonly associated with falls in the private home environment, in rank order, after people factors and steps and stairs:

Inside: Floors (particularly when wet)	Outside: Wet Concrete
Beds (falls from)	Ground (particularly if uneven)
Chairs	Wet Grass
Bathtubs and showers	Ladders
Loose runners and mats	Hoses
Shoes	
Crutches, canes and walkers	
Electric cords	

Mechanism of Injury:

While the above factors can be viewed as causing the fall, there is another set of factors that cause the injury once the fall has occurred. These could be called "impact factors" and the most commonly occurring of these are, as might be expected, hard, unforgiving surfaces.

Injuries and Outcome:

Falls in the home environment resulted in admission to hospital in 28% of cases and 40% when the fall occurred in a nursing home. Fractured femurs were the most common injury in the nursing home population (39%) with injuries being more varied in those falling at home. Of these only 13% were associated with a fractured femur and other injuries included fractures of the humerus, concussion, lacerations and bruising.

What happens to the elderly victim of a fall after admission? For some, a fall will be the first step in a number of potentially life-threatening complications. For others it will mean a loss of confidence, mobility and social interaction. There is such a variety of contributing factors to this category of injury that programmes should aim to provide specific solutions to specific problems adopting a multidisciplinary approach to what is a significant category of injury.