Costs of Falls Among Older Adults

In 2000, the total direct cost of all fall injuries for people 65 and older exceeded $19 billion.¹ The financial toll for older adult falls is expected to increase as the population ages, and may reach $54.9 billion by 2020 (adjusted to 2007 dollars).²

How big is the problem?

- One in three adults 65 and older falls each year.³,⁴
- Of those who fall, 20% to 30% suffer moderate to severe injuries that make it hard for them to get around or live independently and increase their chances of early death.⁵
- Older adults are hospitalized for fall-related injuries five times more often than they are for injuries from other causes.⁵

How are costs calculated?

The costs of fall-related injuries are often shown in terms of direct costs.

- Direct costs are what patients and insurance companies pay for treating fall-related injuries. These costs include fees for hospital and nursing home care, doctors and other professional services, rehabilitation, community-based services, use of medical equipment, prescription drugs, changes made to the home, and insurance processing.²
- Direct costs do not account for the long-term effects of these injuries such as disability, dependence on others, lost time from work and household duties, and reduced quality of life.

How costly are fall-related injuries among older adults?

- In 2000, the total direct cost of all fall injuries for people 65 and older exceeded $19 billion: $0.2 billion for fatal falls, and $19 billion for nonfatal falls.¹
- By 2020, the annual direct and indirect cost of fall injuries is expected to reach $54.9 billion (in 2007 dollars).²
- In a study of people age 72 and older, the average health care cost of a fall injury totaled $19,440, which included hospital, nursing home, emergency room, and home health care, but not doctors’ services.⁶

How do these costs break down?

Age and sex

- The costs of fall injuries increase rapidly with age.¹
- In 2000, the costs of both fatal and nonfatal falls were higher for women than for men.⁷
- Medical costs in 2000 for women, who comprised 58% of older adults, were two to three times higher than for men.¹

Type of injury and treatment setting

- In 2000, traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and injuries to the hips, legs, and feet were the most common and costly fatal fall injuries, and accounted for 78% of fatalities and 79% of costs.¹
- Injuries to internal organs caused 28% of deaths and accounted for 29% of costs from fatal falls.¹
- Hospitalizations accounted for nearly two thirds of the costs of nonfatal fall injuries, and emergency department treatment accounted for 20%.¹
- On average, the hospitalization cost for a fall injury was $17,500.⁷
- Fractures were both the most common and most costly type of nonfatal injuries. Just over one third of nonfatal injuries were fractures, but they accounted for 61% of costs—or $12 billion.¹
- Hip fractures are the most frequent type of fall-related fractures. The cost of hospitalization for hip fracture averaged about $18,000 and accounted for 44% of direct medical costs for hip fractures.⁸
References


