

Does having pain in more than one part of your body increase your risk of a fall?

If you are over 50 years old and have pain in more than one spot (like your back and your knees), your chances of falling could be twice as high as someone without pain. We know this because of new research from a team in the United Kingdom.

Why did they do this study?

Falling at home is common in older people. Having pain in more than one part of the body is linked to falling. Many of us, especially those living with arthritis, have pain in more than one spot. They did this study to better understand the connection between pain and falling.

What did they do?

The team carefully looked for every study that we have about falls in older people with pain in more than one spot. They found 22 studies with a total of almost 25,000 people from around the world. Pulling together information about this many people means that we can have more trust in the findings.

What did they find?

Pain in more than one part of the body was linked to falling in almost all the studies. As the number of painful spots increases, so does the risk of falls. This means that someone with pain in 3 spots (like the back, knees, and ankles) has an even higher chance of falling than someone with pain in 2 spots. Older people who have pain in more than one part of the body have around double the odds of falling as older people who do not have pain.

Why does this matter?

It is important to know if you are at risk of falling. Many older adults find it hard to stay living independently after a fall. If you have pain in more than one part of your body, talk to your healthcare provider. Together you can look for ways to help you stay living safely in your home.

Source reference: Welsh, V. K., Clarson, L. E., Mallen, C. D., & McBeth, J. (2019). Multisite pain and self-reported falls in older people: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *Arthritis Research & Therapy*, 21(67), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13075-019-1847-5>

Lay summary prepared by: Kylie Teggart RN, BScN, CON(C), PhD student, McMaster University School of Nursing