



News Release

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Baby Boomers Face Serious Health Threats

Arthritis, Falls Among Biggest Concerns

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Nearly 40% of Utahns over age 65 who suffered a traumatic brain injury in a fall in 2006 also had arthritis. In 2005 it was just 29%. And the problem will only worsen as today's baby boomers age.

The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) Violence and Injury Prevention (VIP) and Arthritis (UAP) programs are joining forces to celebrate Arthritis Awareness Month in May. Their goal is to better understand if people with arthritis are more prone to falling and if so, why.

“Teaming up arthritis and fall prevention experts is a new way of thinking for us at the UDOH,” said Trisha Keller, Program Manager for the UDOH Violence and Injury Prevention Program. “But we know programs that focus on strength training and flexibility can lessen arthritis pain as well as help to prevent falls, so it's only natural that we work together.”

EnhanceFitness® is an innovative new program taught across Utah that's designed specifically for people with arthritis. It combines cardio work, strength training, stretching, and balance exercises and has been proven to reduce arthritis pain. These same strategies also decrease a person's risk of falling.

Michaelene Waters teaches EnhanceFitness courses in Salt Lake County. “Many of my students tell me they feel physically stronger and are able to avoid injuries better than before participating in the classes,” said Waters.

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Health experts agree. "The programs really help people manage their daily activities in safety so they're able to live more independently as they age," said Rebecca Castleton, UAP Health Program Specialist. "The classes also give participants a fun support system."

Additional data show:

- An estimated 8.6 million people in the U.S. are disabled due to arthritis.
- More than one in five Utah adults lives with arthritis.
- In 2007, 133 Utahns died and another 4,730 were hospitalized due to injuries from a fall. More than 76% of the deaths and 60% of the hospitalizations were among Utahns over age 65.
- Utah has a higher rate of fall hospitalizations than the U.S. (23.8 compared to 20.3 per 10,000 population).
- Falls were the most common cause of injury hospitalization and the second leading cause of unintentional injury death for Utahns ages 65 and older.
- The total cost of hospitalizations due to arthritis-related conditions topped \$278 million in 2007. Fall-related injury hospitalization costs exceeded \$100 million.

Visit www.health.utah.gov/arthritis or call 801-538-9340 for locations and times of the EnhanceFitness classes. Find more tips to prevent falls at www.health.utah.gov/vipp.

If you or someone you care about has been affected by arthritis or a fall, we want to hear from you. Share your story with the Utah Health Story Bank at www.health.utah.gov/bhp/sb/. By sharing your story, you can increase awareness of arthritis and falls and help other Utahns stay safer and improve their health.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.