

Published: January 3, 2012

## “Exercise too helps regain muscle strength”

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Loss of muscle strength plays a major role in causing fractures and falls among the elderly. Although it is the bones that break, resulting in fractures, falls among the older population is a result of weaker muscles, say geriatricians.

Doctors say loss of muscle mass, called sarcopenia, is a generalised and progressive condition and is similar to osteoporosis. According to geriatricians, half the population in the 70 to 80 age group suffer from sarcopenia.

The Geriatric department of the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital recently conducted a survey to assess the muscle health of elderly persons. The survey, done in the population, is necessary to understand the concept of “frailty”, according to the geriatric-researcher M. Priya Darshini.

“We did three camps involving around 300 patients from the community and old age homes. We found that around 29 per cent of the elderly have sarcopenia. The study results were similar to those done by western researchers,” she says. The study excluded persons with known disability but included those with co-morbid illnesses.

Muscle strength is assessed using the bio impedance analyser, dynamo meter and gait assessment. The readings from the three methods are then interpreted to arrive at the person's functional age, Dr. Priya Darshini adds.

Head of Geriatrics department B. Krishnaswamy says: “Loss of muscle strength is associated with fumbling gait and the resultant fall in the elderly. While people tend to lose muscle strength as they age, even exercise can help regain muscle strength. When physical activity falls, appetite reduces and nutrition level also falls. This results in lower muscle strength.” This can be addressed by paying more attention to regular exercise and staying active.

The survey also helped to explain the importance of physiotherapy in the elderly population, according to Dr. Krishnaswamy. “Loss of functional independence is a common cause for disability in the elderly. If you stop walking after a fall you would lose muscle strength. Instead doing exercises based on the individual's ability would help the muscles regain strength,” he adds.