

Decreasing Postpartum Falls: An Evidence Based, Academic-Service Partnership Project.

Khloe Barlow, Amy Gallina, Catherine Glawatz, Adam Golubski, Diana Lee, Danmai Lin, Jennifer Neudecker, Michael Parella:
University at Buffalo, School of Nursing

Julie Cardona RN, Julie Greenan RN, Kim Hartman RN, Mary Lou Simonelli RN, Mother-Baby Nurses, Sisters of Charity Hospital,
Deborah Raines, PhD, EdS, RN, ANEF, University at Buffalo, School of Nursing

Background

- The Joint Commission lists, reducing the risk of patient harm from falls as an annual safety goal.
- Existing fall-risk assessment scales focus on falls in older patients. Yet, these tools are used across settings, including with women who have just given birth.
- Generally the patient population in the perinatal setting is not considered high risk for falls. However falls are the leading cause of physical injury during the post-partum period.



- Changes associated with pregnancy and birth such as altered center of gravity, increased elasticity of blood vessels, increased mobility of the pelvic ligaments and joints, blood loss at delivery, changing blood volume and diuresis as well as interventions such as an epidural anesthetics, pain medication and catheterization all impact a woman's sense of balance and increase the risk of falls.

Purpose

To illustrate the collaboration of an academic-service partnership and the power of student-nurse synergy on a Dedicated Education Unit (DEU) to develop evidence based and population specific tools to promote patient safety and to prevent falls in the post-partum population.

Process

A three stage process to integrate the developing skills of University at Buffalo Nursing Students and the expertise of the Mother-Baby Nurses at Sisters of Charity Hospital.

- Stage 1:** Students completed a systematic literature review and developed a literature matrix. Students and RNs discuss the matrix content and assigned level and quality of evidence ratings to each article.
- Stage 2:** Used the evidence to develop a falls risk assessment tool specific to the post-partum population.
- Stage 3:** Developed an evidence based patient teaching tool, to keep new mothers and their infants safe and to decrease the risk of falls.

Fall Risk Assessment

Risk Factor	Present
History of falling during pregnancy	
Bedrest during pregnancy	
Vertigo: within the past 24 hours or during pregnancy	
Age: <20 or > 35 years	
Epidural or general anesthesia	
Postpartum hemorrhage	
IV fluids running/IV pole	
Catheter, wound drain/wound vac [®]	
Hemoglobin < 8 mg	
Systolic BP <90 mmHg or a decrease in SBP > 30 mmHg from baseline	
Narcotic or sedative medications in the past 24 hours	
Total Risk Factors Present	

Nursing care to prevent falls

- 0-3 risk factors: Assist OOB first time and PRN
- 4-7 risk factors: Assist OOB until risk factors are < 4
- 7-10 risk factors: Yellow symbols

Patient Education

Preventing Falls After Discharge
A Guide for Postpartum Women

Your risk of falling is increased after having a baby. You are more likely to experience weakness, dizziness and fatigue due to a number of factors, such as:

- Blood loss
- Bed rest & inactivity
- Interrupted sleep
- Pain medication

What you can do:

- Proper nutrition and exercise can speed up your recovery & rebuild your strength.
- Ask your partner or caregiver for assistance if you're feeling unsteady.
- Use nightlights to light your path to your baby and bathroom.
- Eliminate obstacles in your home that you can trip over.
- When getting up, sit on the side of the bed and count to 10 before standing.
- After standing up, take a moment to get your balance and breathe before walking.
- Wear shoes outside and shoes or nonslip footwear indoors.

Be mindful and remember...

- When getting up, take a moment to steady yourself before rushing to your baby.
- During pregnancy your body shape, stability and center of gravity changed. It takes 6-week to return to your non-pregnant body.
- Keep pathways clear of obstacles, especially all that new baby equipment in your home.

The Risk: Postpartum women are at high risk for falling.

Why? Weakness, fatigue, and dizziness are common after discharge.

The Solution: Follow these steps to decrease your risk.

Outcome

Postpartum falls can lead to injury to both mother and infant. Using evidence to recognize the unique factors that increase the risk of falls in this patient population and developing evidence based assessment and teaching tools are important components of nursing practice and patient safety.