

ASPIRUS VOLUNTEERS Newsletter

Aspirus Wausau

Winter 2026



Kim Entenmann,
*Director, Human
Resources*

Honoring Our Past, Embracing Our Future

As winter settles in, we're reminded of the warmth our volunteers bring to Aspirus Wausau Hospital and Hospice every single day. Your compassion, dedication, and generosity brighten our halls and strengthen our community—no matter the weather. We are deeply grateful for all that you do.

This season has brought meaningful transitions for our Volunteer Services family. In December 2025, we celebrated the retirement of Yo Voigt, our long-time Director of Volunteers. Yo dedicated her entire 45-year career to Aspirus Wausau Hospital, shaping and nurturing the volunteer program into the strong, vibrant service it is today. Her legacy of kindness and unwavering commitment will continue to inspire us for many years to come.

We look forward with optimism: we are in the final stages of interviewing candidates for the next Director of Volunteers and anticipate naming a new leader later this month.

While these past months have brought considerable change, one thing has remained constant—the strength, spirit, and commitment of our volunteers. You are the heart of Aspirus Wausau Hospital, and because of you, the future of our volunteer program is bright, resilient, and full of promise.

Thank you for all you share with our patients, our teams, and one another. We are grateful for you—today and always.

In this newsletter you can find:

Farewell to Yo

New Volunteers &
Staff

Welcome Project
SEARCH Interns

Annual Volunteer
Hours Recognition

Our Volunteers in
Action

Festival of Trees

Training Held

In Memoria

Calendar of Events

Gift Shop

Final Direct from Yo

Good to Know

We heal people, promote health
and strengthen communities.





Welcome New Volunteers

Aspirus Wausau Hospital

Emily Ably – NICU Office
 Cathy Adrian – Pet Therapy
 Kim Ford – Cancer Center Peer Mentor
 Kelsey Maltbey – NICU Office
 Kay Palmer – Cancer Center Peer Mentor
 Justin Plunkett – Cancer Center Peer Mentor
 Jean Schneider – Family House
 Yo Voigt – Gift Shop
 Carolyn Wilde – Comfort Cart
 Linda Willgohs – Knitter
 Joelle Wilson – Patient Support

Aspirus Wausau Hospital – VolunTeens

Claire Ably – NICU Office
 Siobhan Artz – Heart Waiting Room
 Morgan Barth – Comfort Cart
 Aurora Hayek – NICU Office
 Chloe Munguia – NICU Office
 Karmyn Sorenson – NICU Office

Aspirus Hospice

Kaylynn Allen – Hospice Homecare
 Josiah Beltran (VolunTeen) – Hospice House
 Gage Hazelton – Homecare
 Colene LaMountain – Hospice House
 William Michel – Homecare
 Dave Mueller – Hospice House & Homecare
 Lisa Murillo – Hospice House & Homecare
 Mary Rentmeester (VolunTeen) – Hospice House
 Elizabeth Turajski – Hospice House & Homecare

Aspirus Seasons of Life – Woodruff

Gretchen Goy – Garden
 Ruth Wagner – Garden
 Carrie Williams – Garden

Aspirus LeRoy – Antigo

Sarah Stoehr – Program Support Office
 Cynthia Wilson – Homecare

Welcome New Staff

New Faces at the Coffee Shop

Be sure to stop in to say hello to Bridget and Elexa the next time you're in getting your treat at the Aspirus Coffee Shop. Elexa started August 25th as an occasional Barista, and Bridget started December 15th as a 0.7 FTE Barista. Welcome Bridget and Elexa!

Welcome
Bridget!



Welcome
Elexa!





Welcome Project Search Interns



Here's the latest Project SEARCH class. This year's group includes eight interns who started in September. The program focuses on serving young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities who can benefit from personalized support during an intensive academic year of development and internship experience. Their graduation ceremony will take place on May 19th. Welcome to them all!

Here's a couple of pictures of the interns at work.



Matthew with Supervisor, Troy, working in Maintenance



Kya and Gracie working in the Coffee Shop

Our Volunteers in Action – Volunteer Hours

Annually, we recognize and thank volunteers for reaching lifetime service hour milestones! For 2025, these volunteers are:

100 Hours

Vicki Bradford
Ilona Gusman
Julie Kramer
Ron Lenz
Lisa Peck
Kathy Peterson
Holly Rollo
Katy-Jane Shanak
Julie Trebus
Wolfram Weinberg
Shannon Wilke

200 Hours

Yuni Aucutt
Susan Haugesag
Lisa Jacobson
Penny Miller
Jim Russler

300 Hours

Kristen Anderson
Connie Dulas
Kathy Lenard
David Lewis
Holly Nash
Jeff Schlatterer
Debra Schleinz

400 Hours

Jim Carlson
Betty Rosenbaum

500 Hours

Wendy Borgeson
Linda Lawrence
Ashley Soukup

600 Hours

Kay Bychinski
Nancy Fischer
Tom McCool
Martin Patrickus
Chris Zaglifa

700 Hours

Tom Daman
Kitty Switlick

800 Hours

Susan Aho
Paul Dobbratz
Julie Duley
Connie Michlig

1,000 Hours

Dave Martin
Kris Peterson
Monica Schreiner
Nettie Sosnoski
Gary Spranger

1,500 Hours

Cindy Kleinstick
Carol Steidinger
Mary Ventzke

2,000 Hours

Jerry Fochs
Lois Jarosz
Lynn Kenney
Angela Schuh

2,500 Hours

Cindy Hermel

3,000 Hours

Margie Bosio
Gloria Kostka
Linda Le

3,500 Hours

Judy Jensen

5,000 Hours

Mary Fochs
Marlene Schnelle

5,500 Hours

Ann Goetsch

11,000 Hours

Enid Krueger

12,000 Hours

Gerri Loy

13,500 Hours

Dolly Feira

14,500 Hours

Nancy Zastrow

17,500 Hours

Joan Mais

VolunTeens –

50 Hours

Abigail Warnke

100 Hours

Kimberly Crews
Brinly Stencil
Swayne Stencil

**THANK YOU to all our wonderful volunteers for
volunteering 28,577 hours in 2025!**

*Don't Forget –
Please keep your volunteer hours recorded and up to date.*



Our Volunteers in Action



Holly R. – Patient Support



Eleanor H. – Comfort Cart



Ella – Pet Therapy



Mary F. & Lois J. – Gift Shop

Wausau Volunteers Staff:

- Open, Director of Volunteers & Guest Services
- Mary Dobeck, Volunteer Administrative Coordinator
 - Sue Prahl, Lifeline Coordinator
- Brenda Trapp, Hospice Volunteer Program Lead
- Sammie Giese, Manager of Gift Shop & Coffee Shop

For Hospital Volunteer staff call:
715-847-2848 or email
volunteers@aspirus.org

For Hospice Volunteer Lead call:
715-847-2000, ext. 52436



2025 Festival of Trees

The Aspirus Health Foundation is once again pleased to announce that proceeds from the 2025 Festival of Trees event will help support Aspirus Comfort Care and Hospice Services and the Aspirus Family House.

These funds help provide high-quality, compassionate end-of-life hospice care through Aspirus At Home and also helps support community bedrooms at the Aspirus Hospice House for Individuals who otherwise could not afford to stay. Funds will also help sustain the Aspirus Family House, offering home-like lodging for patients and families who need a safe, affordable, healing place to stay when traveling to Wausau for specialty care.

Your generosity brings compassion, comfort, and hope when it matters most. Thank you for making a difference!



Aspirus Wausau Hospital Volunteers donated this tree to the Festival of Trees.

Your generosity helped raise an astounding, record-breaking **\$315,000!**

Annual Requirements Training Held

It was another full house for the 2025 Volunteers Annual Requirements training held on October 13th. Speakers presented annual competency materials to an engaged audience. Aspirus Employee Health was also available to provide vaccination(s).





In Memoria



Clark Loeffel

July 1953 – November 2025

In November, we experienced a profound loss with the passing of Clark Loeffel, President of the Aspirus Wausau Hospital Volunteer Board. Clark's contagious personality, kindness toward everyone he

met, and deep commitment—both as a volunteer and as a Board Member—made an impact that will be felt for years. His presence will be greatly missed, and we hold his family and loved ones in our hearts.

Clark was a very active volunteer donating his time not only as Board President but also driving the EZ Rider and volunteering at the Day Surgery waiting desk. Over a 9-year period, Clark donated over 2,000 hours of service.

Thank You, Mary V.

With Clark's passing, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to Mary Ventzke who, under difficult circumstances, graciously stepped into the role of Volunteer Board President. Her steady leadership and willingness to serve during this time of change are truly commendable.



Susan Gau-Krueger

March 1952 – April 2024

Susan was a very busy volunteer donating over 3,000 hours of service over a 10-year period as a knitter/crocheter/sewer.

Calendar of Events

February 17

Aspirus Volunteers Board of Directors meeting

February 25

Wisconsin Hospital Association Advocacy Day – Madison, WI

April 19-25

National Volunteers Week

April 23

Aspirus Volunteers Appreciation Banquet MARK YOUR CALENDAR

May 25

Memorial Day – Volunteer office closed

June 2

Aspirus Volunteers Board of Directors & Student Talent Art Review (STAR)



Aspirus Health was well represented at the Prevent Falls Resource Fair in September by Sue Prah, Lifeline Coordinator. Thank you, Sue, for sharing the benefits of Lifeline in keeping our community safe.



Gift Shop

And just like that, another new year! We look forward to what this year holds in store for us. We are already thinking of spring and Easter. Be sure to stop in and enjoy our shopping experience! 😊 *Sammie Giese, Manager*



ASPIRUS GIFT SHOP
COUPON
\$5.00 off an item at the Aspirus Gift Shop!
Exclusions: Ampersand sweatshirts, greeting cards, candy, balloons, flowers, postage stamps, and sale merchandise.
Expires: 4/1/2026

\$5 OFF
AN
ITEM



Direct from Yo ... Final Reflections

The Art of Joi de Vivre WHEN JOY BECOMES THE JOURNEY

I recently read an article in the City Pages by Patrick Wood with some great information. "Imagine approaching our most meaningful work – the projects that enrich others' lives, the contributions that strengthen your community, the accomplishments that truly matter – not as burdens to endure, but as adventures to savor. This is the essence of joie de vivre, the French art of finding deep joy in living itself.

Picture yourself surrounded by kindred spirits, tackling significant challenges together, knowing that while you're building something important, you're also fully alive in each moment. This isn't about making light of serious work – it's about infusing that work with the full spectrum of human joy. When you embrace joie de vivre, you're not choosing between accomplishment and enjoyment: you're discovering they can dance together. The enthusiasm, laughter, the sense of adventure you bring to meaningful work doesn't diminish its importance – it amplifies it.

The magic happens when you realize that the joy itself becomes part of your gift to the world, as valuable as any other outcome you achieve."

I love this reflection! It articulates how all our Aspirus Volunteers bring their joy to the meaningful work they do here at Aspirus.

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DO!



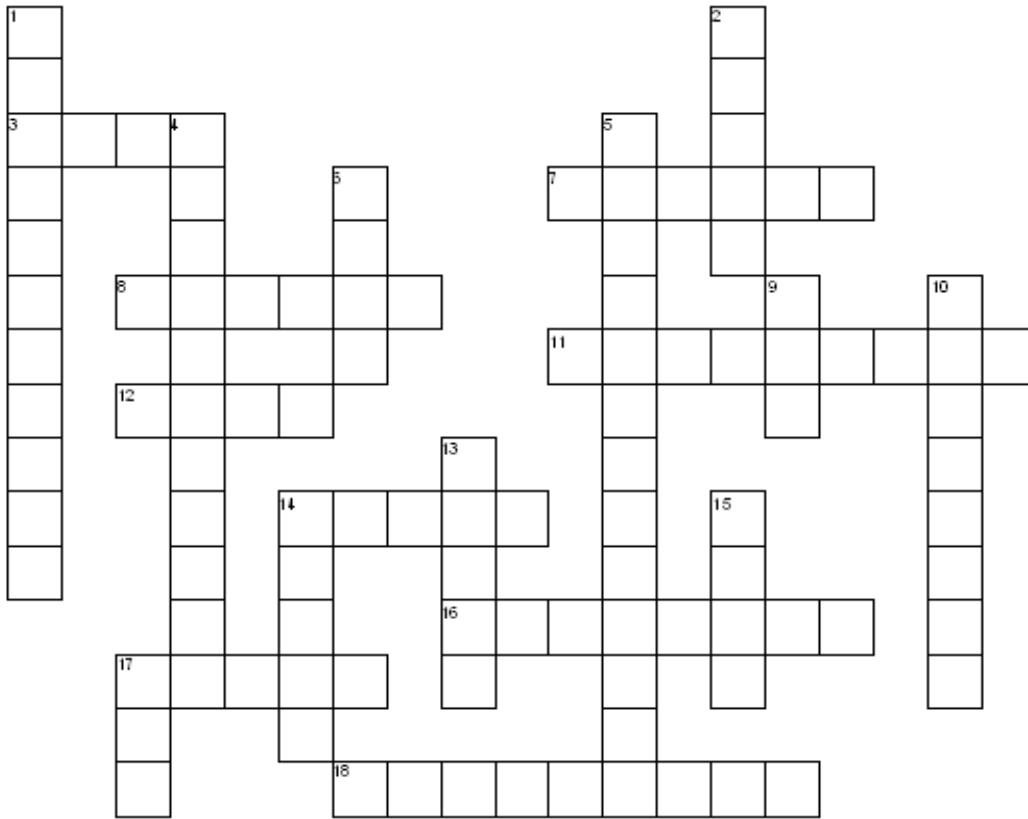
Yo, you are missed!

I just had to add the gnome... 😊



Take more pictures.
Always say I love you. Hug a
little tighter. Talk a little
longer. Make as many
memories as you can.
This Life is Short.

WINTER WEATHER



ACROSS

3. The process by which snow or ice changes to water.
7. A period of very cold winter weather that damages plants.
8. Intensely cold temperature.

11. The temperature felt by the human body when wind makes it feel colder than the actual temperature.

12. Mildly cold feeling.
14. Bright with sunshine.

16. Snowfall that is so heavy one can see little or nothing on the horizon.

17. Ice crystals on a frozen surface; "Old Jack _____."

18. A large mass of snow that slides down a mountain.

DOWN

1. A standardized measure of how hot or cold it is outside.
2. Rain that freezes as it falls.

4. A tool used to measure the temperature.

5. Water that falls to the earth in the form of rain, hail, mist, sleet, or snow.

6. Pieces of ice falling from the sky.

9. A solid form of frozen water.

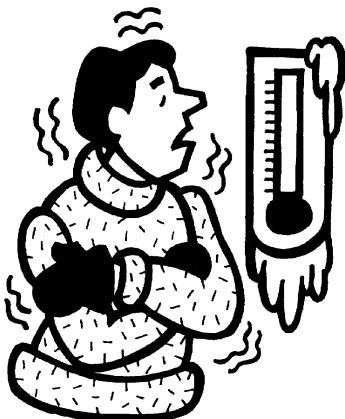
10. A storm with heavy snow, strong winds, and severe cold.

13. Covered with snow.

14. A mixture of snow and water.

15. Precipitation in the form of small white ice crystals that form inside clouds.

17. Thick water vapor that makes it hard to see.





Good to Know



Mary Literski,
*Volunteer &
Board Member*

Benefits of Volunteering

Volunteering helps people improve self-esteem, reduce stress and foster new skills and social connections while promoting civic responsibility. Volunteering is a way to meet new people from multiple backgrounds and build new friendships.

You can learn new skills like teamwork, communication and leadership. Volunteering after a layoff can make a job applicant more attractive to a potential employer. And youth develop skills they cannot learn in the classroom. Did you know that young people who volunteer are three times more likely to volunteer as adults!

Volunteering and the sense of belonging and purpose it brings can combat feelings of isolation. Decreased stress, anxiety and depression contribute to a greater sense of meaning and are positives gained from volunteering. Enhanced self-confidence are also impacted by volunteerism.

Every community has many volunteer opportunities. Whether you walk dogs, push a wheelchair, guide people to a destination, help at a food pantry, or help in an office, you make a difference to everyone you meet. The community gains through your action but personal gain is just as important. Supporting vulnerable populations in your community and addressing social issues are advantages of volunteer work. The positive impact you have on others through your volunteerism is invaluable.

If you know of someone who could benefit from volunteering, please have them contact the Aspirus Volunteers office or direct them to a local agency in need. Thank you for all you do!



Public Policy Education Report

*By Cindy Hermel, Partners of
WHA President-Elect*

Partners of WHA Update

The new year is shaping up to be a busy and impactful year for Partners of Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA). On January 20, the Partners Board met to explore Partners

options for moving forward into the future. Stay tuned for more information. An online members' listening and sharing session will be scheduled after the January 20 interactive Board planning session. We will be eager to share with you goals and plans for the future of Partners.

Advocacy Day will be February 25, 2026, at the Monona Terrace in Madison. There will be inspiring speakers, interesting and informative discussions, and visits to legislators at the state capitol.

The 2026 Partners Conference and Annual Meeting will be October 14 and 15, 2026 at the Stoney Creek Inn located in La Crosse.



Scholarship Program



The Aspirus Wausau Hospital Volunteers will provide scholarships to graduate high school Aspirus Wausau Volunteers pursuing post-high school study.

Aspirus Volunteers will award individual scholarships as follows:

- \$1,000 – 30-49 volunteer hours donated
- \$1,500 – 50-99 volunteer hours donated
- \$2,000 – 100 or more volunteer hours donated

Aspirus Volunteers and the scholarship committee of each school will make their scholarship recipient selection(s) based on the following criteria. A student must:

- Have donated at least 30 hours to volunteer activities sponsored by Aspirus Wausau Hospital including Rainbow's End. Lifetime Aspirus volunteer hours will be used to determine this requirement.
- Volunteer status should be active: Definition of active is currently volunteering or have volunteered in the 12 months prior to graduation.
- In accord with school scholarship committee:
 - Be reliable, dependable, of high integrity, have leadership qualities, and relate well to staff and peers.
 - Be in good academic standing.

To apply to volunteer:

call **715.847.2848**

visit **aspirus.org/become-a-volunteer**



scan

Topic Tuesdays 2026



*Learn more about dementia and brain health
with our Dementia Care Specialists*

3rd Tuesdays - Dementia Basics:

An introduction to dementia for individuals, family, and caregivers.

4th Tuesdays - Brain Health

Basics: Learn more about options and choices leading to a healthier brain.

Topic Tuesday presentations are about 1 hour in length and scheduled with virtual options, as well as in person options rotating at locations in Antigo, Marshfield, Merrill, Wausau, and Wisconsin Rapids.



Registration
required.

See back of page for
the next available
session near you, or
call

888-486-9545

or visit

www.adrc-cw.org

Topic Tuesdays 2026 Schedule



All sessions 3:00-4:00 pm

Wausau:

Dementia Basics
Jan. 20th
July 21st
Brain Health Basics
Jan. 27th
July 28th

Wisconsin Rapids:

Dementia Basics
Feb. 17th
Aug. 18th
Brain Health Basics
Feb. 24th
Aug. 25th

Merrill:

Dementia Basics
March 17th
Brain Health Basics
March 24th

Marshfield:

Dementia Basics
April 21st
Sept. 15th
Brain Health Basics
April 28th
Sept. 22nd

Antigo:

Dementia Basics
May 19th
Oct. 20th
Brain Health Basics
May 26th
Oct 27th

Virtual:

Dementia Basics
June 16th
Nov. 17th
Brain Health Basics
June 23rd
Nov. 24th

Registration is required.

888-486-9545

www.adrc-cw.org

It's known that our vision changes with time. Eye health is vital to older adults because the risk of developing eye diseases increases as we age. If left untreated, these diseases can lead to vision loss, which could impact their independence and quality of life. Here are 7 eye care tips to help older adults maintain their vision.

1 Regular eye exams

The best way to detect problems early is by reminding your older adults to schedule their annual eye exams. Their optometrist can detect potential eye problems related to aging, such as cataracts, macular degeneration, glaucoma, and other degenerative eye diseases.



2 Wear your prescription glasses

Whether farsighted or nearsighted, older adults should always wear their prescription glasses, both in and out of the sun; they reduce eye strain, which can lead to other vision problems.



3 Keep your eyes protected

Direct sunlight can damage your eyes, cause various forms of cancer, and cause other eye issues. Ask your older adults to keep a pair of prescription sunglasses handy to help protect their eyes while assisting them in seeing clearly.



4 Use proper lighting indoors

Remind your older adults to keep rooms well-lit, even during the day, especially if they read frequently or watch a lot of television. Appropriate lighting, without glare or shadows, helps eyes focus and significantly reduces eye strain.



5 Try eating healthy foods

A diet rich in vitamin C, as well as foods rich in antioxidants, beta-carotene, and lutein, can help reduce the risk of age-related macular degeneration, or AMD. For dinner, recommend sweet potatoes, carrots, and spinach; for dessert, try strawberries, kiwis, and oranges.



6 Exercise and stop smoking

Regular exercise increases blood flow, which increases the amount of oxygen circulating through the body—including the eyes. Any type of exercise is beneficial to older adults. If they smoke, ask them to consider quitting. It will improve their health in more ways than one.



7 Be proactive

Exercise, a healthy diet, and lifestyle changes can help improve eye health. However, low vision can contribute to an increased risk of falls. Simple adjustments around the house can improve the quality of life despite vision changes. Recommend the Lifeline Medical Alert Service to your older adults with vision problems to signal for help if a fall does occur.



Contact us today to learn more:

Name:



Essential Caregiver Checklist

Caring for a loved one from near or far requires planning and coordination. This checklist provides essential steps to ensure your loved one's safety, health, and wellbeing—while helping you feel more confident and prepared in your caregiving role.

- Ask your loved ones to sign a release so you can speak to their healthcare team
- Assess home safety on your next visit including fall hazards and the presence of fire extinguishers and smoke/CO2 detectors
- Check out options for transportation, including ride-hailing apps and local faith- or community based resources
- Consider a medical alert system with fall detection that calls for help even if your loved one can't
- Create a care circle — a group of family, friends and professionals — who help you support your loved one
- Equip your loved ones cell phone with apps for easy video communication with the family and friends and reduce isolation
- Investigate local organizations that specialize in home modifications or improvements for seniors
- Know how to reach their primary care physician, specialists and local hospital
- Make sure you have up-to-date information on your family members' prescription and OTC medications
- Schedule regular phone calls or video chats with your loved one to maintain a strong connection
- Secure your own copies of legal documents like advance directives, living wills, etc.
- Support good nutrition by signing up for meal delivery services or installing an app on your loved one's phone



Every caregiving situation is unique, so adapt this checklist to fit your loved one's specific needs. The most important thing is to start somewhere and build your support system over time.

Lifeline

The Correlation Between Diabetes and Falls Risk



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Falls among older adults with diabetes are common and costly

Older adults managing diabetes often suffer from a number of serious complications, including retinopathy and peripheral neuropathy, which are well understood as contributing to gait instability and falls.¹ Several established risk factors for falls are more common in people with diabetes, including peripheral neuropathy, decreased physical and cognitive performance, poor vision, and increased use of antidepressant medication.²

Furthermore, older adults with diabetes have a higher risk of sustaining a fall-related injury requiring hospitalization than those without diabetes. In particular, those using insulin have three times the risk, as fractures are more common in those with diabetes using insulin.²

The estimated yearly cost of diagnosed diabetes in the U.S. is \$412.9 billion, including \$306.6 billion in direct medical costs and \$106.3 billion in indirect costs attributable to diabetes.³

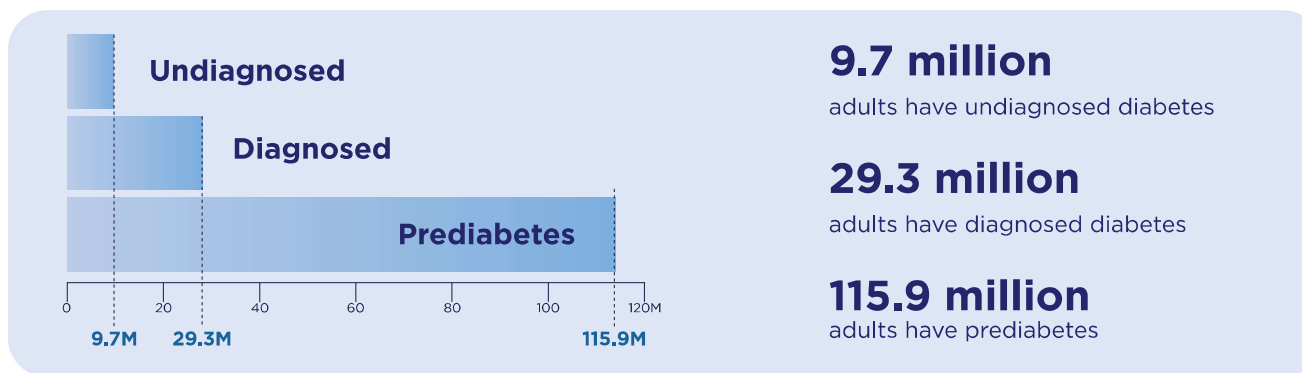
1. D'Silva L., Lin J., et al., "Impact of Diabetic Complications on Balance and Falls: Contribution of the Vestibular System," *Phys Ther* 2016 Mar;96(3):400-9. doi: 10.2522/ptj.20140604. Epub 2015 Aug 6. PMID: 26251477; PMCID: PMC4774386.

2. Yau R., Strotmeyer E, et al., "Diabetes and risk of hospitalized fall injury among older adults," *Diabetes Care* 2013 Dec;36(12):3985-91. doi: 10.2337/dc13-0429. Epub 2013 Oct 15. PMID: 24130352; PMCID: PMC3836123.

3. Parker E., Lin J., et al., "Economic Costs of Diabetes in the U.S. in 2022," *Diabetes Care* Jan 2024; 47 (1): 26-43. <https://doi.org/10.2337/dci23-0085>.

Diabetes among older adults is on the rise

According to the American Heart Association, as of 2017-2024 data, approximately 29.3 million Americans have diagnosed diabetes, another 9.7 million have undiagnosed diabetes, and 115.9 million individuals are considered to have prediabetes.⁴



Older adults with diabetes have an increased risk of falling due to a number of factors, including:

- **Diabetes complications** - poor vision, lower extremity neuropathy, and postural hypotension
- **Symptoms associated with extreme fluctuations of blood glucose**
Hypoglycemia (shakiness and blurred vision) and Hyperglycemia (weakness and blurred vision)
- **Side effects of medications**
- **Fear of falling** - leads to activity restriction causing a decline in mobility
- **Advanced Age** - decreased strength and balance
- **Home hazards** - uneven surfaces, rugs, furniture, clutter

Recognizing that there is a direct correlation between diabetic complications and increased falls risk, this educational piece focuses on diabetes-related falls risk factors, as well as falls prevention and intervention strategies specific to older adult diabetic patients.

4. Martin, et. al., "2024 Heart disease and stroke statistics: a report of U.S. and global data from the American Heart Association," *Circulation*. Published online January 24, 2024. doi: 10.1161/CIR.0000000000001209.

Diabetes and falls risk among older adults

Older adults with diabetes have a higher risk of falling more than once a year, especially those who take insulin. **The overall chance of falling in aging adults with Type 2 diabetes is 59% higher than that of non-diabetic older adults, and in those who take insulin, the chance of falling is 162% higher.**⁵

Diabetes causes many complications, including peripheral neuropathy and retinopathy, which are well understood as contributing to gait instability and falls, as well as nephropathy, which is the leading cause of end-stage renal disease (ESRD) in the United States, especially in the elderly.⁶

We will discuss how these sequelae can work both independently and interdependently to increase falls risk.

5. Freire L.B., Brasil-Neto, J.P., da Silva, M.L., et al., "Risk factors for falls in older adults with diabetes mellitus: systematic review and meta-analysis," *BMC Geriatr* 24, 201 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-024-04668-0>.

6. Abdel-Rahman E., Alhamad T., et al., "Management of Diabetic Nephropathy in the Elderly: Special Considerations," *J Nephrol Ther.* 2012 Oct;2(5):124. PMID: 24010011; PMCID: PMC3760431.



Peripheral neuropathy is present in more than half of Type 2 diabetic patients aged 60 or older

Peripheral neuropathy (PN) is caused by nerve damage from chronically high blood glucose levels. Damaged nerves can't carry messages between the brain and other parts of the body, leading to numbness, loss of feeling, or pain in the hands, feet, and legs. People with PN may not feel pain if they cut their feet, which can lead to severe consequences like ulcers and amputation.⁷

About 60% to 70% of all people with diabetes will eventually develop peripheral neuropathy. In older adults with diabetes, PN is especially troublesome due to its detrimental effects on stability, sensorimotor function, gait, and activities of daily living. In the US, 28% of adults aged 70-79 years and 35% of adults aged ≥ 80 years have peripheral neuropathy.⁸

7. "Peripheral Neuropathy & Diabetes," WebMD, reviewed by M. Dansigner, MD, Sept 2023
8. Vinik A., Strotmeyer E., et al., "Diabetic neuropathy in older adults," *Clin Geriatr Med.* 2008 Aug;24(3):407-35, v. doi: 10.1016/j.cger.2008.03.011. PMID: 18672180; PMCID: PMC2706706.



Nearly 3 out of 4 diabetic patients develop retinopathy

Diabetic retinopathy (DR) is a common complication of diabetes that can lead to vision loss or impairment. It's caused by high blood glucose levels damaging the retina, the part of the eye that detects light and sends signals to the brain. **After 30 years of living with diabetes, nearly 100% of older adults develop retinopathy.**⁹

Symptoms include blurred or cloudy vision, depth perception deficits, and difficulty adjusting to shifting lighting conditions. Due to these symptoms of DR, falls in older adults represent a public health problem, particularly as the **incidence of falls can be as high as 40% in diabetic older adults.**¹⁰

9. World Health Organization, "Eyes on Diabetes," www.emro.who.int/noncommunicable-diseases/highlights/eyes-on-diabetes.html

10. Freire and Brasil-Neto, "Risk factors for falls in older adults with diabetes mellitus: systematic review and meta-analysis," *ibid.*



As many as 40% of older adult diabetics develop diabetic nephropathy

Historically known as diabetic nephropathy, chronic kidney disease (CKD) attributed to diabetes is often referred to as diabetic kidney disease (DKD) and is the major cause of CKD and end-stage kidney disease (ESKD) in those over 60 years old.¹¹

Adults aged 65 or older with CKD were at increased risk of falling and suffering an injury as a result of a fall compared with adults in the same age range without CKD.¹² In CKD patients, factors such as chronic inflammation, vitamin D deficiency, and proteinuria can contribute to muscle loss, compromising muscle strength and balance, thereby increasing the risk of falls.¹³

11. Wild, S., Roglic, G., et al., "Global Prevalence of Diabetes: Estimates for the Year 2000 and Projections for 2030," *Diabetes Care* 2004, 27, 1047-1053.

12. Kistler B., Khubchandani J., et al., "Falls and Fall-Related Injuries Among US Adults Aged 65 or Older With Chronic Kidney Disease.," *Prev Chronic Dis* 2018;15:170518. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd15.170518>.

13. Lin P., Wan B., et al., "Risk of fall in patients with chronic kidney disease: results from the China health and retirement longitudinal study," *BMC Public Health* 2004, 499 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-17982-4>.



Strategies to help reduce falls risk in diabetic patients

Integrating these four (4) standards of practice for falls screening and prevention into your diabetic care plan can help reduce the risk of falls for older diabetics.

Step 1 – Awareness of Falls Risk and Diabetes

The findings, as mentioned earlier, highlight the danger of falling among older adults as it corresponds to three major diabetic complications. Additionally, Lifeline can provide you with educational brochures for your older adult diabetics and their families to explain factors that increase risk of falling and provide various approaches to mitigate falls risk.

Here are some ways to reduce the risk of falls among your older diabetics:

Awareness: Be aware of the side effects of medications, and get eyes and hearing tested.

Exercise: Balance and strength training

Home safety: Remove clutter, rugs, and cords from walkways and install stair handrails.

Footwear: Wear low-heeled shoes that fit well and provide good support.

Blood glucose: Keep blood glucose levels near target.

Fall prevention devices: Always wear your Lifeline medical alert device.

Step 2 – Falls Risk Assessments

Evaluating falls risk is a recommended best practice. Commonly used assessment tools include the Timed Up and Go Test to measure functional mobility and the Functional Reach Test to measure balance.

Timed Up and Go (TUG) tests functional mobility for older adults.¹⁴

1. Have your older adult sit in an armchair.
2. Ask him/her to get out of the chair and walk 10 feet.
3. After walking 10 feet, have him/her turn around, return to the chair, and sit back down.
4. Observe him/her closely for gait and balance disturbances.
5. He/she should be able to complete the entire test in less than 20 seconds.
6. If he/she is unsteady or the test takes more than 20 seconds, refer to a physical therapist for further evaluation.
7. Refer your client to the Lifeline Medical Alert Service so that he or she can signal for help quickly in the event of a fall or complication.

Functional Reach is a test to measure balance in older adults and their risk of falling.¹⁵

1. Secure a yardstick to the wall horizontally at shoulder height.
2. Mark a line on the floor about 10 inches to the right of where the yardstick begins.
3. Ask him/her to stand on the line with feet together, having his/her right shoulder nearest the wall.
4. Direct him/her to reach out along the yardstick as far as possible without losing their balance.
5. Those unable to reach more than 10 inches may be at an increased risk of falling.
6. Refer to a physical therapist for further evaluation and suggest he or she consider Lifeline to get help quickly.

14. Podsiadlo D., Richardson S., "The Timed "Up and Go": A Test of Basic functional Mobility for Frail Elderly Persons," *J Amer Ger Soc* 1991, 39(2), 142-148.

15. Duncan P., et al., "Functional reach: A new clinical measure of balance," *J Gerontol.* 1990; 45:M192.

Step 3 – Self-Care Management

A self-care management plan should include education on how to get up safely from a fall.

Use this illustration to explain to your older adults the correct way to rise after falling.

How to Get Up After a Fall

A step-by-step guide detailing the correct way to get up from a fall

How to Get Help

One out of five falls causes a serious injury in older adults, such as broken bones or a head injury.^{16, 17} In the event of an emergency, Lifeline lets your diabetic adults get help quickly, potentially reducing medical complications that could result from being immobile for a prolonged period.

1. Prepare



Getting up quickly or the wrong way could make an injury worse. If you are hurt, call for help using Lifeline.



Look around for a sturdy piece of furniture or the bottom of a staircase. Don't try to stand up on your own.



Roll over onto your side by turning your head in the direction you are trying to roll, and then move your shoulders, arm, hips, and then, your leg over.

2. Rise



Push your upper body up. Lift your head and pause for a few moments to steady yourself.



Slowly get up on your hands and knees and crawl to a sturdy chair.



Place your hands on the seat of the chair and slide one foot forward so it is flat on the floor.

3. Sit



Keep the other leg bent with your knee on the floor.



From this kneeling position, slowly rise and turn your body to sit in the chair.



Sit for a few minutes before you try to do anything else.

Source: Dr. Dorothy Baker, Ph.D., RNCS, Research Scientist, Yale University School of Medicine.

16. Alexander B., Rivara F., Wolf M., "The cost and frequency of hospitalization for fall-related injuries in older adults," AM J Pub Health 1992;82(7):1020-3.

17. Sterling D., O'Connor J., Bonadies J., "Geriatric falls: injury severity is high and disproportionate to mechanism," J Trauma-Injury, Infection and Critical Care 2001;50(1):116-9,3.

Answer Key

