



Tips for Careworkers: Frailty

What it is: Signs of frailty include unplanned weight loss, slow walking speed, weakness and low physical activity with the person feeling exhausted or tired.

Why it matters: Older people are not always frail or dependent. After the age of 80 years it is more common. Frailty affects a person's health, and ability to recover from poor health. Frailty and dementia together predict a more rapid decline and shorter life expectancy.

Knowing when older people with life-limiting illness are frail, helps us to know they are approaching death. Careworkers spend a lot of time with the older person and by reporting signs of frailty they can make certain that the right care is received.

What I need to know: Older people who are frail often have poor health, many conditions, falls and disability, as well as longer stays in hospital, and are more likely to die.

When a person is frail or at risk of becoming frail, illnesses such as infections are harder to recover from.

Older people and people with a life-limiting illness should be monitored for frailty so that care plans can be made to support their needs.

Do

Look out for non-specific signs of frailty:

- extreme fatigue
- slow walking speed
- unexplained weight loss
- many infections.

Do

Look out for specific signs of frailty:

- frequent falls
- fear of falling
- restricted activity
- delirium (acute change to their mental state)
- fluctuating disability (having good days and bad days) with, for example,
 - loss of interest in food
 - difficulty getting dressed.

Name:

My reflections:

What are some of the signs of frailty? How do I report these?

How many people in my care could be considered frail?

At what age does frailty become more common?

My notes:

See related palliAGED Practice
Tip Sheets:
Cachexia, Sarcopenia, and Anorexia
Palliative Care
Recognising Deterioration

References used to develop this sheet are available at
www.palliaged.com.au