Frailty warning for seniors as innovative new test promises healthier ageing

Older Australian women are most at risk of frailty, according to new research that highlights how an online test and a series of simple interventions can help senior Australians maintain their independence and improve their health.

Aged Care Minister Ken Wyatt AM said the Australian Government-funded Frailty in Community Dwelling Older People – Using Frailty Screening as the Canary in the Coal Mine study outlines a life-changing opportunity.

“Frailty detection is a game-changer in helping senior Australians enjoy a healthier and more active future,” said Minister Wyatt.

“By taking the simple FRAIL five-point online test and following up with your GP as necessary, people have the opportunity to detect frailty before it hits, allowing them to take action to live better lives, remain in their own homes for longer and avoid potential hospitalisation.

“People classed as frail are more at risk from fall injuries, deteriorating health and premature death.”

The Australian-first study, conducted by aged care provider Benetas, took 3,000 home-dwelling seniors aged 65 and over through the FRAIL Questionnaire Screening Tool test, targeting Fatigue, Resistance, Ambulation Illnesses and Loss of weight (FRAIL).

The study found:

- The frailty prevalence rate was 6 percent
- 38 per cent fell into the pre-frail category
- Slightly more than half (56 per cent) were categorised as robust
- Women were found to have a much higher incidence of frailty than men
- 5 per cent of men were frail, compared with 8 per cent of women
- 34 per cent of men were pre-frail compared with 41 per cent of women
- Almost half of the women surveyed were either frail or pre-frail, compared with less than 40 per cent of men.

“The results show frailty is not present in all seniors surveyed, suggesting it is not an inevitable result of ageing and may be prevented or treated,” said Minister Wyatt.
"Importantly, the study recommends that with the right support at the right time, frailty can be halted or even reversed by consulting with health professionals for safe, simple, inexpensive, practical interventions."

These include:

- Modifying diet to include more proteins
- Taking Vitamin D supplements
- Increasing activity, including light resistance exercises and walking
- Evaluating prescription medication intake, in consultation with your GP

Minister Wyatt encouraged all seniors to take the FRAIL test.

“We know Australians overwhelmingly want to remain in their own homes for as long as possible and that staying strong and healthy is the best way to achieve this,” the Minister said.

“Early intervention strategies like the FRAIL test are critical and can also contribute to a more sustainable and efficient aged care system.”

The FRAIL test is available through the Positive Ageing Resource Centre website. At the conclusion of the brief questionnaire, users can print off a personal summary to present to their health professional.

The screening tool at parc.net.au complements the individual screening and online supports available on the My Aged Care website.

The Frailty in community dwelling older people – Using Frailty Screening as the Canary in the Coal Mine study is available here.

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