

The Judo Flanders carefree falling project for elderly people: development, methodology, implementation, and results in Flanders 2015 - 2019

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Background: The origin of this contribution was the fact that fall risk factors have been mainly targeted intrinsic (e.g., muscle weakness, balance, agility) or extrinsic (e.g., environmental hazards, assistive devices). And, despite all those efforts, (elderly) people still fall, often with injuries.

Methods: As a certified judo trainer, I decided to focus my attention to tripping and slipping in daily life, specifically the moment just before landing. Metaphorically we regard falls as a short movie. Paradoxically the most important injury prevention exercise is easy to learn and absolutely safe for a population at risk. All fall exercises start from the ground. Gradually we climb up (personalized-based) direction standing position, 'playing back' the fall movie, with small judo based exercises, protecting wrists and head! Participants learn mainly memorizing the position of the forearms when loosing balance. For storing in long-term memory, where it can be 'retrieved' by loss of balance, we based methodologically our lesson on the motor learning model from Fitts and Posner and the notions of motor imagery.

Results: After several tests in 2013 with different homogeneous and heterogeneous elderly groups, the final result was one standard 'special' gym lesson of 1 hour, embedded in the general prevention awareness raising philosophy of fall and injury prevention.

Discussion: For obtaining a preventive effect on a larger scale I needed more certified judo teachers with a different mindset: teaching fall techniques to a vulnerable group in function of a health issue and thinking 'out of the dojo'. Judo Flanders adopted this idea and placed it in their policy plan.

Conclusion: Over 100 fall sessions later, in the whole of Flanders, our collected data from more than a thousand participants (most over 65), show at least, that judo falling techniques can be learned by elderly people, without injuries and in a relaxed manner.

Keywords: Fall techniques, elderly