

Preventing Falls

Tips for Older Adults



We have all fallen down at some point and most times, we are able to get back up without injury. But, as we get older, we may fall down more often due to our worsening hearing, vision, and balance.

Falls are dangerous for older adults. As we age, our muscles and bones get weaker, making it easier to get hurt from a fall. Falls are a leading cause of injury among older Canadians. In fact, up to 85% of all injury-related hospitalizations among seniors (Ministry of Health Ontario, 2017) are a result of falls.

The good news is that you can take a few simple steps to prevent falls, while still being able to go about your day and maintain your independence.

This handout gives healthy lifestyle tips and a home safety checklist that you can complete to reduce your risk of falling.

LIFESTYLE TIPS

In General

- Move slowly when getting up. You can get dizzy when changing positions, so pause for a few seconds when you first sit or stand up.
- If you do not feel safe doing something, ask for help.
- If you have been advised to wait for help when getting up, always make sure someone is present before moving.
- Always plan ahead. Taking your time and having a plan are some of the most important things in preventing falls.
- Do not let any fear or anxiety about falling prevent you from keeping moving. Inactivity can make you weaker, and can increase your risk of falling even further.

Healthy Eating

- Eat a balanced diet, with good amounts of fruits, vegetables, and proteins. This will help you build up your muscles and bones, and will give you the energy to keep moving.
- Eat at regular meal times and drink water as directed by your doctor. Skipping meals and not having enough water throughout the day can cause you to feel weak or dizzy.
- Speak to your doctor about taking calcium or vitamin D. Vitamin D and calcium both help to keep bones strong.
- If you have diabetes, make sure you check your blood sugar regularly and take your insulin (or other diabetes medicines) as directed by your doctor. Blood sugar levels that are too high or too low can make you feel weak or groggy.



Exercise

- Make sure you keep moving! Get at least 150 minutes of regular exercise per week.
 - » Exercise doesn't just mean going to the gym. You can walk, swim, garden, or anything else you enjoy that keeps you moving. If you're moving, you're exercising!
- Speak to your doctor about Falls Prevention Programs in the community. Some community centres and hospitals have programs that teach exercises to keep you strong and prevent falls.

Always speak to your doctor before starting any type of exercise program to make sure it is right for you.



If any of the exercises you do cause you pain or shortness of breath, stop and rest. Do less next time. Talk with your doctor or healthcare provider.



Medicines

- Review the medicines you take with your doctor or pharmacist every year.
- Keep an up-to-date list of your medicines, just in case you need to show your doctor.
- Read the instructions on your medicines carefully. Always take as directed.
- Ask your doctor about side effects from any of the medicines you are taking. Some medicines can make you dizzy, drowsy, or have blurry vision, which can increase your risk of falling.
 - » If your medicine affects your ability to move or makes you feel unstable, take your time when moving around. Rest after changing positions (such as from sitting to standing), and wait until you feel stable before moving on.

- » If you have any of the side effects listed, tell your doctor. They may be able to give you another medicine to try, or may change your dosage to reduce or get rid of these effects.
- Do not mix medicines with drugs or alcohol.

Safety Equipment

- Do not be embarrassed to use your safety equipment. These items are meant to keep you safe and independent.
- If needed, use your glasses or hearing aids when getting up.
- Always wear appropriate footwear when getting up. Make sure your shoes or slippers have good grip and support.
- **Do not** get up in socks or any other type of foot covering that is worn out or does not have enough grip.
- Make sure that the mobility aids you use are always within arms reach, so you do not have to get up without them.
- Consider buying a falls alert necklace or bracelet. These devices can detect if you have fallen, and will automatically tell family members or the police to come and check on you.

Ask your doctor to recommend any safety equipment for your home, or mobility aids (walker, cane, wheelchair, etc.).

They may recommend a home visit by an occupational therapist or physiotherapist, who can suggest equipment for you that is best suited to your home.





HOME SAFETY CHECKLIST



Outside the House

- ☐ Keep your front steps and walkway clear from snow, ice, leaves, or anything else you might slip on.
- ☐ Consider installing a motion sensor on your entranceway lights, so that the light turns on anytime you are near.
- ☐ Keep the yard clear of any obstacles, such as rakes or hoses, when they are not in use.

Stairs

- ☐ Make sure you have a handrail in your stairs (ideally on both sides).
- ☐ **Never** rush up and down the stairs. This is a major cause of falls.

Bathroom

- ☐ Place a non-slip mat in your tubs and showers.
- ☐ Install grab bars by the toilet and bath to help you stand up and sit down. Firmly secure the grab bars to the wall.
- ☐ Do not use other wall-mounted devices, such as towel racks, as they will not be able to support your body weight.
- ☐ If needed, consider installing a raised toilet seat. This can make it easier to get up.
- ☐ Consider using a shower chair or bench. Standing while showering can sometimes be tiring. Sitting down during your shower can help you save your energy and keep your balance.
- ☐ Wipe up any water outside of the tub right away.
- ☐ Use an absorbent, anti-slip bath mat outside of your shower or tub to help avoid slipping on puddles.

Kitchen

- ☐ Keep kitchen supplies in easy-to-reach locations (not too high or too low).
- ☐ Keep heavier things (stand mixers, bags of flour, pots and pans, etc.) on lower shelves, or on countertops.
- ☐ When accessing high shelves, use a sturdy step stool with a safety rail, not a chair.
- ☐ Wipe up spills right away to prevent slipping.
- ☐ When cleaning up, use a mop or broom. Do not bend down to wipe spills.

All Living Spaces (such as the Living Room, Bedroom, etc.)

- ☐ Make sure all areas of your home (indoors and outdoors) are well lit. Seeing an obstacle in advance is the most important thing in avoiding it!
- ☐ De-clutter as much as possible! The less you have lying around, the less there is to trip on.
- ☐ Consider using a cordless phone or cell phone instead of a wired phone. Keep it near you, so you do not have to rush to answer the phone.
- ☐ Install a night light in areas you might use if you were to get up at night (bathroom, bedroom, hallways, etc.).
- ☐ Keep high traffic areas, such as the area from your bedroom to your bathroom, clear.
- ☐ Remove any rugs or mats. They can slip from under you or cause you to trip.

If you are concerned about obstacles or mobility restrictions in your home, ask your family doctor or primary healthcare provider to set up a Home Care Safety Assessment.





If you fall...

- Try to land on your bum (buttocks) to protect your bones.
- Do not rush to get up. Check to make sure you are not injured before you get up, or let someone help you up.
- Make an appointment with your doctor as soon as possible after you've fallen. They can help to determine why you fell, and how you can avoid that in the future.



If you have fallen and are too weak or in too much pain to get up, call 9-1-1 right away.



For more information, contact

Senior's INFOLine
1 (888) 910-1999

Public Health Agency of Canada
<http://www.publichealth.gc.ca/seniors>