

Falls Prevention

Understanding the risks and what to do



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Why do falls matter?

Falls are a leading cause of injury-related hospitalizations, health complications, and death among older adults in Canada. According to Health Canada, 1 in 3 Canadian seniors fall at least once each year.

Risk factors for falls

<i>Intrinsic</i>	<i>Extrinsic (Environmental)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Age-related changes<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Reduced balance or muscle strength○ Slower reflexes• Medical conditions<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Stroke○ Arthritis○ Dementia○ Parkinson's disease○ Diabetes• Medications: any medications that can cause drowsiness or dizziness• Foot problems<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Poor footwear○ Neuropathy○ Foot pain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Home hazards<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Loose rugs○ Poor lighting○ Slippery surfaces○ Clutter or lack of clear walkways• Unsafe stairs<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Missing or unstable railings○ Uneven steps○ Slippery floor material• Outdoor risks<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Ice and sleet○ Uneven sidewalks○ Poor weather conditions• Assistive devices: improperly fitted canes, walkers, or other mobility aids

Tips for preventing falls

1. **Make an appointment with your doctor to discuss the following:**
 - a. **Your medications:** bring a list of all the medications you take
 - b. **Your previous falls:** take note of when, where, and how you fell
 - c. **Your health conditions:** focus especially on eye and ear disorders
2. **Keep moving:** risk of falling doesn't mean you should stop movement entirely. Consider activities like water workouts or tai chi, which can improve coordination and balance, or see a physical therapist (PT).
3. **Wear sensible shoes:** avoid high heels, floppy slippers, shoes with slick soles, or walking just in stockings. Instead, choose shoes that fit properly, are sturdy and flat, and have non-slip soles.

4. **Remove home hazards**

- Clear walkways and high traffic areas of clutter and furniture
- Secure loose rugs or remove them entirely
- Repair loose flooring or carpets right away
- Store necessities within easy reach
- Immediately clean spilled liquids, grease, and food
- Use non-slip mats in your bath/shower

5. **Light up your living space**

- Keep your home brightly lit
- Place night lights in bedrooms, bathrooms, and hallways
- Place a lamp near your bed to use when you get up at night
- Make sure light switches are accessible
- Consider using glow-in-the-dark or illuminated light switches
- Turn on the lights before going up or down stairs
- Store flashlights in easy-to-find locations

6. **Use assistive devices**

- Your doctor may recommend a cane or walker
- Install handrails on both sides of stairs
- Add non-slip treads for wood steps
- Use a raised toilet seat with arm rests
- Install grab bars for shower/bath and use a sturdy plastic chair

Helpful technology

1. **Medical alert devices:** this is the most “low-tech” option. Usually a necklace or wristband with an emergency button. If you fall, feel unwell, or otherwise need help, press it and it will contact emergency services. Some models have automatic fall detection and GPS.
2. **Smart watches:** like a medical alert bracelet, but more advanced. A combination of a watch, fitness tracker, and communication and safety device in one. Some models have automatic fall detection and GPS, and will make an emergency call if you fall down.
3. **Voice/smart home assistants:** devices that you control with your voice, like Amazon Echo (Alexa), Google Nest Hub (“Hey Google”) or Siri. Can be a physical device or a program on your phone. If you fall or need help and don’t have your phone on you, you can ask it to make an emergency call.