

Home Safety

Preventing Falls at Home



Home Safety

What are the dangers of falls?

- Falls are the leading cause of injury among older Canadians.
- Falls can usually be prevented.
- Injuries from falls can lead to disability, chronic pain, less independence, and a lower quality of life.



Facts about falls

- 1 in 3 older Canadians fall each year.
- 1 in 3 of those who fall are seriously hurt.
- 4 in 10 falls treated in hospital involve broken (fractured) hips.
- 50% (half) of hospitalizations related to falls happen because of falls at home.



If it is an emergency: Have a plan to call for help if you fall.



Are you at risk of falling?

- The best way to make your home safer and help prevent falls is to know if you are at risk of falling.
- **You are at a higher risk of falling if:**
 - › You are over the age of 65.
 - › You have a chronic (ongoing) condition affecting your mobility (movement) (like arthritis, osteoporosis, poor balance, or trouble seeing or hearing).
 - › You take 4 or more different medications each day.
 - › You have poor nutrition (do not get enough nutrients) because of a lack of appetite (not feeling hungry), trouble going out to shop, or not eating healthy foods.
 - › Your home is not safe (it has clutter, poorly lit hallways, loose carpets or rugs, etc.).
 - › You have chronic foot problems, or you wear shoes or slippers that do not fit well.
 - › You do not get enough physical activity or exercise.
 - › The areas around your home are not safe (there is snow, ice, or needs repairs).
 - › You live alone without support.
 - › You do not have the mobility aids you need (like a non-slip tub/shower surface, grab bars, bath seat, or lower kitchen cupboards).
 - › You do not have a plan in case you are injured after a fall.

How do I know if I am at risk of falling?

Go through these questions with the help of your support person.

Check YES or NO for each statement below:

1. Bathroom

My bathroom has mobility aids to help me get around more easily, like:

Non-slip surfaces in tub/shower

Yes

No

Grab bars by the toilet to help me sit down and stand up

Yes

No

Grab bars by the tub to help me get in and out

Yes

No

A raised toilet seat

Yes

No

A bath seat in the shower

Yes

No



2. Kitchen

I store items that I use often where they are easy to reach.

Yes

No

My heavy items are stored in lower cupboards.

Yes

No

I always wipe up spills right away.

Yes

No



3. Stairs

My stairs are well-lit.

Yes

No

I have and use handrails on the stairs.

Yes

No

I take my time when going up and down the stairs.

Yes

No



4. Footwear

I wear non-skid slippers/footwear around the house.

Yes

No



My outdoor shoes fit well, have a low heel, and are comfortable.

Yes

No

5. Vision

I can see well.

Yes

No

I see each step on a staircase clearly.

Yes

No

My house is well-lit.

Yes

No



I have had my eyes tested in the last 12 months (1 year).

Yes

No

I always remove my reading glasses when I am walking.

Yes

No

I use a nightlight or turn on a light when I get up in the middle of the night.

Yes

No

6. Hearing

I can hear well.

Yes

No

I have had my hearing tested in the last 12 months.

Yes

No



7. If I fall

I know what to do if I fall and cannot get up.

Yes

No



If you answered NO to any of these statements (1 to 7), you may be at risk of falling.

8. Medication(s)

I take the following medication(s):

- Sedatives

Yes

No



Sedatives include:

Benzodiazepines

Generic name	Brand name	Also called
Alprazolam	Xanax [®]	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anxiety pills• Calming pills• Panic attack pill
Diazepam	Valium [®]	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sleeping pill• Anxiety pill• Seizure pill• Relief of spasm pill• Alcohol withdrawal pill
Lorazepam	Ativan [®]	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anxiety pill• Calming pill• Sleeping pill• Seizure pill
Temazepam	Restoril [™]	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sleeping pill• Restless leg syndrome pill

Others

Generic name	Brand name	Also called
Zopiclone	Imovane [®]	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Z drug• Sleeping pill

- Fluid pills

Yes

No

Fluid pills may also be called water pills. They include:

Generic name	Brand name	Used to treat
Furosemide	Lasix®	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heart failure • High blood pressure • Water pill • Liver disease pill
Spironolactone	Aldactone®	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High blood pressure • Liver disease • Heart failure • Low potassium
Hydrochlorothiazide	Microzide®	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swelling • High blood pressure • Pregnancy eclampsia

- Blood pressure pills

Yes

No

- Pain medication

Yes

No

- Heart medication

Yes

No

- Medication for Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, or seizures

Yes

No

- Medication for depression, anxiety, or nausea (upset stomach)

Yes

No

I take 4 or more different medications each day.

Yes

No

9. Medical conditions

I have the following medical conditions:

- Arthritis

Yes

No

- Alzheimer's, other type of dementia
 - Yes No
- Diabetes
 - Yes No
- Osteoporosis
 - Yes No
- Seizures (loss of body control)
 - Yes No
- Leg length discrepancy (legs are different lengths)
 - Yes No
- Congestive heart failure (CHF)
 - Yes No
- Heart disease
 - Yes No
- Cancer
 - Yes No
- Parkinson's
 - Yes No
- Depression
 - Yes No
- Dizziness, lightheadedness, fainting
 - Yes No
- Incontinence (not able to control your bladder or bowels) or frequency (having to pee or poop often)
 - Yes No



10. Activity/Exercise

I find it hard to exercise because:

- I have arthritis.
 - Yes No
- I have shortness of breath.
 - Yes No



- I have pain.

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
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- I keep doing things even when I am tired or not feeling well.

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
------------------------------	-----------------------------
- I often get up too quickly and then feel dizzy or unsteady.

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
------------------------------	-----------------------------
- I am embarrassed about or do not like to use my mobility aids (walker, cane).

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
------------------------------	-----------------------------
- I have not been active for a long time.

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
------------------------------	-----------------------------
- I do physical activity/exercise less than 3 times a week.

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
------------------------------	-----------------------------

11. Living room

Areas where I walk are cluttered.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

I use a landline phone fixed to one place in my home (not a cordless or cell phone) that I often have to rush to answer.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

The lighting is low, making it hard to see things on the floor.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

The path to the bathroom is partly blocked.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

I have scatter rugs or mats on the floors.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

There are electrical cords running across areas where I walk.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

I have a pet that often gets under foot.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

I climb up on furniture when I need to reach something.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|



I use chairs that are low and can be hard to sit in or get up from.

Yes

No

There are some tripping hazards that need to be fixed.

Yes

No

I live alone.

Yes

No

12. Bedroom

I get out of bed often at night to go to the washroom.

Yes

No

I do not always put on non-skid footwear when I get up at night.

Yes

No

When I get out of bed, I am dizzy for a few minutes.

Yes

No



13. Nutrition

I have trouble eating (sore mouth, missing teeth, trouble swallowing).

Yes

No

I often do not feel like making myself a meal.

Yes

No

I find it hard to eat healthy.

Yes

No

I sometimes miss meals.

Yes

No



14. Outside

I am not able to keep pathways and steps free of ice, snow, leaves, and/or newspapers.

Yes

No



If you answered YES to any of these statements (8 to 14), you may be at risk of falling.

Fall Prevention Checklist



In your home

- Make sure all areas of your home are well lit.
- Have a lamp or light switch near your bed that you can easily reach without getting up. A ‘touch lamp’ is a great idea.
- Have a night light in your hallways, bedroom, and bathroom.
- Keep pathways to all your rooms free of clutter. **This is very important if you use a cane or walker.**
- Remove small rugs and mats that are not fixed to the floor or secure them with tape.
- Keep all electrical wires and telephone cords secured safely out of pathways.
- Use higher chairs and chairs with solid armrests, as they are easier to get in and out of.
- Never open your door to anyone you do not know.
- Install smoke detectors on every floor of your home. Test them every 6 months.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector in your home, if needed. Test it every 6 months.
- Plan an escape route for every room in your home.
- When using a space heater, make sure it is not near anything flammable (can burn).
- Use power bars to prevent overloading electrical outlets.
- Have fire extinguishers placed around your home. Know how to use them and check regularly to make sure they are full.
- Have a first aid kit handy and keep it stocked.

Bedroom safety

- Keep your eyeglasses within easy reach and always put them on before you get out of bed.
- Keep your bed at a height that is easy for you to get in and out of.
- If you use walking aids (like a walker or cane), keep them within easy reach. Use them every time you get up, especially at night.



- If you have to go to the washroom at night often or feel like you have to go right away: drink less fluids before bedtime, pee before going to bed, and do Kegel exercises regularly.
 - › To do Kegel exercises: tighten and then loosen the muscles in your pelvic floor. These are the muscles you squeeze when you are trying not to pee.

Stairs

- Install handrails on both sides of your stairs. Make sure the handrail is as long as the stairs.
- Hire someone or ask a family member to fix loose or uneven steps and handrails.
- Always keep stairs free of clutter.
- Make sure there is a light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs.
- Only go up or down stairs with the light on, as it can be hard to see the edges of steps.
- Use reflective tape to outline step edges.
- Doors at the top of stairs should open away from the stairs.
- Attach carpet firmly to the stairs. Put non-slip rubber treads on the stairs if there is no carpet.



Outside

- Hire someone or ask a family member to paint your outside steps with a mixture of sand and paint for better grip.
- Make sure paths around your home are in good repair and kept clear. Ask or hire someone to clear snow, ice, newspapers, and leaves from your walkways and outside steps.
- Watch for moss, uneven or broken surfaces, wet and slippery surfaces, and pets or small animals.
- Always keep a light on at your outdoor entrances and stairs.
- Only use a ladder when you have to (if there is no one to help you). Make sure the ladder has a wide base. Make sure the base is secured and is not going to slip.



Kitchen

- Keep things you use most often in reach by keeping them on lower shelves or on the counter.
- Use a long-handled reacher to reach lighter items stored higher than you can easily reach.
- **Do not climb to reach things.**
- Only lean on furniture (like a table or counter) if it is strong enough to support your weight.
- Plan your meals ahead of time. Think about using a meal delivery program (like Meals on Wheels) or buy meals that are easy to make.
- If you use a walker, a tray attachment makes it easier and safer to carry things around your kitchen.
- Wipe up spills right away.
- If your eyeglasses get fogged up while cooking, wait for them to clear before moving.
- Make sure the “on” and “off” positions on stove dials are clearly marked.
- Keep oven mitts within easy reach when cooking.



Bathroom

- Talk to your occupational therapist (OT) about safety equipment for the bathroom (like grab bars, raised toilet seats, bath benches, or seats).
- Have a non-slip rubber mat or non-slip adhesive strips put in your tub.
- If you have a hard time getting in or out of your tub, ask for help. Have a sponge bath if there is no one to help you.
- Keep things you use often (like soap, shampoo, and towels) in reach so you do not have to bend or reach to get them.
- Test water temperature before getting into a tub or shower.



Clothing

- Wear non-slip, low-heeled shoes, enclosed heels, or slippers that fit well and have a good sole. Avoid wearing slippers, as they have less traction (grip) and could cause you to slip. **Do not walk around in socks because they can be slippery.**



- Sit down when dressing. Do not stand on one leg.
- Wear clothes that will not catch on furniture.
- Dresses or pants that are too long can make it hard to walk or move.

Tips to prevent falls

- Know where pets are before getting up.
- Pump your ankles before standing if you have been sitting for a while. To pump your ankles: point your toes up and then down.
- Stand up, stop, and get your balance before you start walking.
- Always walk slowly and standing up straight. Do not rush or make quick movements.
- Do not raise your arms above your head when walking.
- Use assistive devices and safety equipment as directed by your OT.
- Have your eyesight and hearing tested regularly.
- Review all of your medications with your health care provider and/or pharmacist on a regular basis.
- Exercise regularly to improve your muscle strength, balance, and coordination.
- Eat well-balanced meals and limit how much and/or how often you drink alcohol.
- Get up slowly after lying or sitting down. If you feel dizzy, wait before you stand up.
- **Do not carry heavy, large, or awkward things that can throw you off balance.**
- Keep your phone or cell phone in reach. A cordless phone beside your bed is a good idea.
- Keep emergency numbers in large print next to each phone.
- Think about using a medical alert system.



Mobility equipment safety

- Keep mobility equipment in good condition.
- Know how to use your equipment. Ask your OT for help.
- Use wheel brakes on equipment that is meant to be stationary (not move) when being used (like a Hoyer® lift).

Medication safety

- Never take someone else's medication(s).
- Take your medication(s) exactly as prescribed.
- **If you have an allergy alert bracelet or necklace (MedicAlert®), wear it at all times.**
- Use only one pharmacy for all of your prescriptions.
- Sort through your medications every 6 months. Get rid of any expired medications, including over-the-counter products and supplements. Your local pharmacy can get rid of your old medications safely.



Regular exercise can help prevent falls

- Regular exercise helps you stay physically and mentally healthy and can greatly lower your risk of falling.
- Older adults should try to exercise for **30 minutes a day**. Try to find an activity you enjoy, like:
 - › Walking
 - › Light jogging
 - › Dancing
 - › Water aerobics
 - › Chair exercises
 - › Yoga
 - › Tai Chi
 - › Stretching
 - › Gardening
 - › Walking a dog
 - › Taking the stairs instead of the elevator



Always check with your primary health care provider before starting a new exercise program.

Tips:

- Keep a phone in each of the rooms you use most often, or carry a cordless phone or cell phone with you at all times.
- Keep a list of emergency phone numbers close to your phone or on your phone.
- **Consider getting a personal emergency response service if you are at risk of falling. This will let you get help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**



Notes:

Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <https://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

Nova Scotia Health promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.

Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!

www.nshealth.ca

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If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.