

Health Education Fact Sheet

From Nurses for You

Nursing Best Practice Guideline

Reduce Your Risk for Falls

Did you know that in Canada, falls are the sixth leading cause of death among older adults?

Here are some more facts that might surprise you:

- One in three older adults fall each year.
- Over one in three of those who fall develops serious injuries.
- Forty percent of admissions to nursing homes are the result of a fall.
- Falling is also the leading cause of injury-related admissions in hospitals for people over 65 years of age.

Why do your chances of falling increase as you age?

Some people experience changes to their vision, unsteady gait and poor balance. Others are affected by health problems like arthritis, osteoporosis, Parkinson's disease, and side effects from taking multiple medications. These are only some of the many potential risk factors.

What can you do?

- Rise slowly from a bed or chair to avoid any sudden drop in blood pressure. Ask for assistance when needed.
- Watch for slippery surfaces when outdoors especially in the winter.
- Reduce hazards in your home. Watch for pets, cords, and secure mats, scatter rugs and area rugs, using double-sided tape.
- Make sure that you have appropriate lighting in your home.
- Install appropriately placed grab bars for all toilets, showers and tubs, and non-slip surfaces on all bathtubs and showers.
- Chair-based exercises, stretching and walking are examples of exercises to improve your strength and balance. Before starting on an exercise program, consult with a health care professional (your doctor or nurse).
- Wear appropriate footwear (non-skid rubber soled and low heels) and avoid wearing only socks on tile or wood floors.
- Use gait aids prescribed for you such as a walker or cane for ambulation.
- If you are at risk of falling, wear hip protectors to reduce your risk of injury.

- Be informed about bone health (prevention and treatment of osteoporosis). If you think that you may be at risk of osteoporosis, see your doctor and ask to be tested. If the result of your test shows that you are experiencing bone loss, medication to help maintain/improve bone strength may be prescribed for you.

What is the government doing about preventing falls in the older adult?

In 2001, the Ontario Provincial government passed a bill called the Patient Restraints Minimization Act. Under this Act, health care facilities are required by the government to use alternative methods to prevent falls. Now, most health care facilities have some form of a falls prevention program.

A good falls prevention program may include:

- An initial and on-going assessment of the individual to find out the risk or likelihood for falling.
- Regular review of medications to decrease any potential or real side effects (e.g. dizziness, unsteady gait) that may increase the risk of falling.
- Proper assessment by the Occupational Therapist and/or Physiotherapist to ensure appropriate prescription of assistive devices (walkers, canes, or wheel chairs).
- Helping individuals exercise and strengthen their muscles.
- Creating a safe environment with minimal hazards.
- Post fall follow-up to ensure appropriate treatment and evaluation to prevent further falls.

Ideally, falls prevention programs should be individualized for each person. Talk to your nurse, doctor or other health care provider to find out about the falls prevention program in your health care setting.

Where else can you go for more information?

If you or a family member/friend have access to a computer, visit the Health Canada website at www.hc-sc.gc.ca for additional information on how to prevent falls.



This information fact sheet is developed as a supplement to the RNO Nursing Best Practice Guideline document developed for nurses. Its intent is to increase your knowledge and involvement in making decisions about your health. The nursing best practice guideline, *Prevention of Falls and Fall Injuries in the Older Adult*, is available for public viewing and free download at www.rno.org/bestpractices.



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