

Seniors' Falls Prevention

A slippery floor, a moment of weakness, a walker out of reach... More than one third of seniors in Canada will experience a fall, making it the leading cause of injury among this group. What if it happens to your loved one? What if it happens to you?

Over 85 percent of all injury-related hospitalizations in seniors (individuals 65 years and older), falls can result in disability, chronic pain, loss of independence, reduced quality of life, and even death. Based on data from 2008–2009, we know that half of falls (50%) occurred in the home, 35% of fall-related hospitalizations involved a hip fracture, falls result in longer length of stay and longer wait times for transfers from hospital to other living arrangements., (Canadian Institute of Health Information). The incidence of falls among seniors is set to increase given Canada's aging population. In Newfoundland and Labrador the share of the population of seniors is projected to increase from 13% in 2005 to 29% by 2031.

A **fall** is defined as a sudden and unintentional change in position resulting in an individual landing at a lower level such as on an object, the floor, or the ground, with or without injury (Canadian Falls Prevention Curriculum, 2007). Trips, slips and stumbles are considered a fall and account for most hospitalizations. The unfortunate fact is that most of these falls are preventable.

Falls are not a result of aging, but falls do occur more often among older adults. Fall risk factors increase with age and are usually associated with health and aging conditions. By effectively addressing risk factors associated with falling among seniors we can decrease the number and severity of falls that occur. Muscle weakness and decreased physical function are found to be the most important risk factors, increasing the risk of falling by 4 to 5 times. Other factors that create risk include cognitive impairment, taking several medications, or fall hazards.

If a person feels he/she or a family member is at risk of a fall, they should approach their health care provider to request an assessment. Effective fall interventions include:

- Education about falls and fall risk factors.
- Regular exercise focusing on increasing leg strength and improving balance.
- Review of both prescription and over-the counter medicines, to identify medications that may cause side effects or interactions such as dizziness or drowsiness.
- Eye examination at least once a year.
- Make a home safer by reducing tripping hazards (such as removing mats), adding grab bars inside and outside the tub or shower and next to the toilet, adding railings on both sides of stairways, improving the lighting in the home, and use of supportive shoes both inside and outside the home.
- Get adequate calcium and vitamin D.
- Do weight bearing exercises.
- Get screened and, if needed, treated for osteoporosis.
- Use protective devices such as hip protectors.

Remember...Falls among seniors are preventable! Let's maintain and improve the quality of life and well-being of our seniors by taking a proactive approach to prevent and manage falls in our community!

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