



Hold steady

Tips on preventing falls



Every 10 minutes in Ontario, at least one person over the age of 65 visits an emergency room because of a fall. Most falls are preventable, and the following are some simple but important steps that you can take to lessen your chance of falling and suffering an injury.

Falls Happen: No matter how sure-footed you feel, falling is a significant health risk for adults over age 65 in Ontario. The most common type of fall is caused by slipping or tripping on level ground, often at home. While you may already take extra care on stairs because of the risk of falling and injuring yourself, trips and slips on level ground result in many more injuries and permanent disabilities than falls on stairs each year.

Even if you are over 65 and feel that you are in great overall health, it's important to remember that you are still more vulnerable to falls, which can have a devastating effect on your quality of life.

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Managing your medication: Medications are important, but can also contribute to the risk of falls; some can affect your balance, muscle control, blood pressure or cause drowsiness. Any of these symptoms can increase your risk of falling. If you are taking one or more medications, either prescription or over-the-counter, you might have an increased risk of falling. There are a few things you can do to reduce this risk:

- Be careful when combining medications, whether they're over-the-counter medications or prescriptions, and pay attention to whether they make you feel dizzy or drowsy.
- Make an appointment with your doctor and bring a list of all the prescription and over-the-counter medications you take – even the ones like acetaminophen and allergy medications. Talk to your doctor about any feelings of light-headedness or being off-balance.

Making adjustments at home: There are many factors that contribute to falling, but making small adjustments in your home can help reduce the risk. For example:

- Do you have slippery hardwood or linoleum floors? Try using non-slip waxes and choose footwear that doesn't slide. Socks and some slippers provide little grip on these surfaces.
- Are there loose throw rugs or small mats on floors? These can create tripping and slipping hazards.
- Do any electrical cords run across the floor? Try tucking these against the walls to reduce the chance of getting a foot caught on them.

Getting out on the town

Staying active is one of the best ways to prevent falls because it contributes to better balance, gait, and muscle reaction. Something as simple as taking a walk each morning can significantly reduce your risk of falling! There are many things you can do to stay active. Here are a few ideas to get started:

- Talk to your doctor about whether an exercise program is right for you. Some seniors' centres offer fitness programs tailored to your age group, and can teach you new ways to get active.
- Go for a daily walk, or try a low-impact exercise like Tai Chi, swimming, or using a stair-climbing machine. These improve balance and strength with the added benefit of being easy on muscles and joints.

Falling can seriously impact your quality of life and is almost always unexpected. To reduce your chance of falling, and to help you maintain your independence, take the following steps:

- Watch for tripping or slipping hazards in the physical environment
- Talk to your doctor about your medications' side effects
- Stay fit and active.

The recommendations above are meant to get you started on thinking about easy ways to lower your risk of falling. There are many other things that you can do to reduce your risk and prevent falling injuries.

To learn more about preventing falls, and for suggestions about what you can do to prevent falls in the home and out of doors, go to the OMA's web page at www.oma.org/falls.