

MAINTAIN YOUR INDEPENDENCE: MOST FALLS CAN BE PREVENTED!

Falls are a major cause of injury for people over 65 years of age. Falls among seniors happen not just in winter nor outside on slippery sidewalks—they actually occur all year round. Most falls occur in the senior’s own home and local sidewalks.

Falls can lead to discomfort and inconvenience. Seniors are more likely to have a major injury with the fall. It is estimated that 2 out of 3 seniors are not able to get back to their former activity level after the injury. Fall injuries are also a main reason why seniors move to a nursing home.

Some seniors will develop fear of falling and are afraid to go outside, especially in the winter. Fear of falling will affect your social life and independence. Here are some risk factors to think about:

Risk factors for fall:

- Not paying attention to your surroundings
- Not eating enough, which can make you weak and dizzy
- Rushing; over-reaching; not using a handrail; climbing on chairs or unsteady step-stools
- Wearing improper shoes or slippers
- Having more than two alcoholic drinks in a day
- Hazards like loose carpets, slippery tubs, poor lighting, stairs with no rails, uneven or icy sidewalks and parking lots

The good news is that many of the injuries can be prevented. Below are some things you can start doing right now to reduce your risk of falling.

Ways to prevent falls:

- Review your drugs (including over-the-counter drugs and herbal supplements) and their side effects. Many drugs have side effects that may increase your risk for a fall. For example, sleeping pills and pain medicine can cause you to become dizzy or drowsy.
- Respect your physical limitations and level of fitness. Make sure that your activities are appropriate to your abilities. Know your limitations and always ask for assistance. Use walking aids or home safety equipment if you need them.
- Keep bones strong. Eat foods rich in calcium and vitamin D. Ask your doctor whether you need osteoporosis screening and treatment. You may need calcium and vitamin D supplements to reduce bone loss.
- Stay active. There are many exercise programs and classes for seniors. Leg strength and balance exercises will help the most in preventing a fall. Talk with your doctor before starting an exercise program.
- Assess and reduce hazards in and around your home
- Wear proper footwear with low heels and rubberized soles
- If you have a chronic medical condition, talk to your doctor about your special fall risks and how to avoid them.
- For more information check: <http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/aging/initiatives.htm>

Source: Apple Magazine, Calgary Health Region website:

http://iweb.calgaryhealthregion.ca/printable_forms/pdf/healthinfo/ExerciseFitness/605850_Exercise_and_Bone_Health_2006-03.pdf