

THE FACTS ON FALLS FOR SENIORS

Did you know falls are the most common cause of injury for seniors?

- 1 in 3 seniors will fall each year.
- Half of all seniors who fall do so more than once.
- Almost half of all seniors who fall hurt themselves.
- Even without an injury, a fall can make you worry and reduce your activity.
- Most falls happen in the home in **bathroom, kitchen, and on stairs.**

Falling is not a normal part of getting older!!

What are the causes of falling?

- Having poor balance and weak legs or you have fallen before
- Taking risks like climbing up on chairs and not paying attention to what you are doing.
- Rushing and hurrying (for example, when you are going to the bathroom or answering the phone).
- Not asking for help when you cannot reach something, or when you are sick or feeling weak.
- Having unsafe conditions in or outside of your home, such as broken or missing handrails.
- Wearing unsafe footwear (for example, wearing open-backed shoes or slippers, or going barefoot).
- Taking the wrong dose of medications, taking pills at the wrong time, or taking more than 8 medications a day can make you feel shaky, dizzy or weak.
- Drinking alcohol, which affects your alertness and balance

What can I do to prevent some falls?

Pay attention.

- Take time to slow down, plan ahead. Ask for help when you need it.

Improve your bone health: Prevent **osteoporosis** (having bones that can break easily).

Osteoporosis Canada recommends:

- Age 50 and over: Take 1200–1500 mg of calcium every day. **(From diet and supplement)**
- Age 50 and over: Take 800–1000 International Units of vitamin D everyday.

Take supplements to get enough calcium and vitamin D.

Eat healthy meals and don't skip meals.

Wear safe footwear and take care of your feet.

- If your feet hurt, you will be less active and have more of a chance of falling.
- If you have diabetes or poor feeling in your feet, see a foot doctor.
- Wear shoes with non-slip soles and low, wide heels.
- Make sure your shoes or slippers fit well.
- Do not go barefoot or wear backless shoes or slippers.

Take your medicines as directed: Remember - alcohol affects how medications work.

- Talk to your doctor about taking sleeping pills. Sleeping pills increase the chance of falling.
- Tell your doctor **ALL** the medications you are taking, including herbal medicines.
- **Have your healthcare provider review your medicines every year.**

Have your vision and hearing checked.

- Wear your glasses and hearing aids.

Make your home safer.

- Have grab bars put next to your toilet and in the tub or shower.
- Improve the lighting in your home. As you get older, you need brighter lights to see well.
- Have handrails and lights put in all staircases.
- Remove clutter that you could trip over (like papers, books, clothes, and shoes) from stairs and places where you walk.

Get moving: Begin a regular exercise program.

- Strong bones and muscles reduce the risk of falling. Make your bones stronger through exercise.
- Improve your balance, coordination, and leg strength through regular exercise.
- Try walking, dancing, bowling, doing tai chi.

I am living with a chronic health condition, are there any programs that help build my muscle and bone health?

Living Well with a Chronic Condition Program for people living with chronic diseases in Calgary area offers education, exercise or self-management classes.

Please go to www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/cdm or Call 403 943 2584 for English classes and call 403-650-4933 for Mandarin/Cantonese classes.

Some of the classes are available in Punjabi, Cantonese, and Mandarin.

What do I do if I fall?

- Don't rush to get up. Make sure you are not hurt before trying to get up or letting others help you get up. Stand up slowly and safely.
- Tell someone that you have fallen and see a doctor if you are hurt.
- Have your medications checked by the doctor.
- Don't let your fear of falling again stop you from being active.

For More Information

- Speak with your family doctor, or for 24-hour nurse advice and health information, call Health Link Alberta at 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free. Mandarin Health Link Calgary 403-943-1554, Cantonese Health Link Calgary 403-943-1556
- Preventing falls - go to the Finding Balance at www.findingbalancealberta.ca
- Brochures in Spanish and Chinese can be found at www.cdc.gov/injury
- To learn more about bone health, go to www.osteoporosis.ca
- Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research - www.acicr.ualberta.ca

If you want to read any of the previous 'Road To Healthy Living' series articles, please go to http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/diversity/multilingual_health_services.htm and get health information in your own language.