



Preventing Falls Together

RISK FACTORS FOR FALLING

1. Dizziness: What can cause dizziness?

- Not eating regularly
- Change in body position (e.g., from sitting to standing)
- Low blood pressure
- High blood pressure
- Medication side effects
- Inner ear problems
- Acute illness or infection

What you can do

- Sit on the side of the bed for a few minutes before you stand up.
- After standing, pause and take one slow deep breath before you take a step.
- Have your blood pressure checked regularly.
- Tell your doctor if your medication is making you drowsy or dizzy.
- Have your hearing checked and include a check for possible infections.
- Attend blood pressure clinics.
- Perform mild balance-related exercises or consult with your physiotherapist, a doctor or nurse about balance training.
- Ask your doctor to refer you to a nutritionist.

2. Medications: What can cause medication concerns?

- Taking over-the-counter (non-prescription) medications, herbal remedies, or alcohol while also taking prescription medications.
- Using someone else's medications.
- Not being sure what medications you are taking, how many you should take, and why you need to take them.
- Using outdated medication.
- Your doctor may not be aware of all the medications you are taking, especially if you see other physicians—including specialists.
- Your doctor may not be aware of the side effects you have experienced.

Adapted from: "The First Step to Falls Prevention", Burnaby, BC



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What you can do

- Never borrow medication from others.
- Keep a list of your medications in your wallet or purse and on the fridge.
- Properly dispose of outdated medications.
- If you are taking prescription medications, check with your pharmacist or doctor before you use any over-the-counter medications or herbal remedies.
- Avoid alcohol when you are taking prescription medications.
- Review your medications with your doctor at least every six months and whenever any medication is added or stopped.
- Ask your pharmacist about medication side effects and possible drug interactions before taking any medication.
- Use the same pharmacy for all your prescriptions.

3. Foot Problems: What can cause foot problems?

- Poorly fitting footwear, high heels, and shoes with no support.
- Joint problems in your feet as a result of arthritis and previous injury.
- Untreated foot, skin, and nail problems, like calluses, bunions, or ingrown toenails.
- Loss of sensation which makes it difficult to feel the floor which can be caused by diabetes or neurological disorders.

What you can do

- Wear proper-fitting supportive shoes with low broad heels.
- Talk with a nurse or doctor about calluses, bunions, corns, or ingrown toenails.
- Wear loose socks or stockings. Knee-highs can cut off circulation in your legs and numb your feet.
- Swelling in your legs and feet can be a sign of a medical problem. Talk to your doctor.



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4. Weak Muscles, Stiff Joints and Brittle Bones: What can cause weak muscles and stiff joints?

- Lack of physical activity, including stretching and walking.
- Unresolved injury, pain or discomfort.
- Conditions affecting the muscles and joints such as arthritis, osteoporosis, Parkinson's disease, and stroke.

What you can do

- Join an exercise program.
- Join a program for helping osteoporosis.
- Plan a regular activity and gradually increase the amount of time you spend on it.
- See a physiotherapist for specialized exercises.
- Contact local support groups.
- Talk with your doctor about your discomfort or soreness.

Think about:

- the time of day you are likely to be uncomfortable
- activities that make you sore or cause discomfort
- when the discomfort is worst
- what you do for the discomfort

It's a good idea to write down all this information down and discuss it with your doctor, a physiotherapist, occupational therapist, or nurse.

5. Bladder and Bowel Control: What can cause changes in bladder and bowel control?

- Weakness of muscles controlling flow
- Infection
- Side effects of medications
- Prostate problems
- Constipation can contribute to bladder problems
- Changes in your eating and drinking habits



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What you can do

- For constipation: eat a high-fibre diet, drink plenty of fluids and exercise.
- Drink enough fluids. Drinking too little fluids will cause irritation to the bladder and possibly urinary tract infection.
- Incontinence products are available at medical supply stores and pharmacies.
- Talk to a doctor, nurse, or physiotherapist about exercises to strengthen muscles that control urine flow.
- See your doctor if you notice any changes in bladder and/or bowel control. Tell your doctor about any blood in your urine, foul-smelling urine, difficulty or pain urinating, urinary frequency, difficulty getting to the bathroom on time, constipation, or diarrhea.

6. Difficulty with Vision or Hearing: What can cause vision difficulties?

- Dirty or scratched eyeglasses
- Getting used to bifocals
- Eyesight prescription has changed
- Low lighting causing eyestrain
- With age, eyes become sensitive to glaring light
- Diseases affecting the eyes such as cataracts, glaucoma, infections, diabetes

What you can do

- Wear sunglasses.
- Maintain control of diabetes.
- Clean glasses regularly. Use a non-glare cleaner and soft cloth.
- Pause and give your eyes time to adapt to changes in light.
- Use good lighting and night lights in halls, stairways, and bathrooms.
- If you use bifocals, be extra careful while you adjust to them, especially on stairs.
- Have your vision checked once a year.

What can cause hearing difficulties?

- Wax build-up in ear
- Age-related hearing loss, hearing-aid or inner ear problems



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What you can do

- Have your hearing checked periodically and maintain your hearing aids in good working condition.
- See your doctor about any dizziness or other symptoms related to inner ear problems.

7. Sleep Disturbances: What can cause difficulties with sleeping?

- Lack of daily physical activity
- Poor sleeping environment
- Lack of sunlight
- Stress
- Feeling nervous, anxious, or worrying
- Age-related intolerance to sleeping pills
- Sadness or depression
- Medication and alcohol use
- Aches and pains
- Grief and loss
- Having coffee, tea, cola, alcohol, or chocolate in the evening—these all contain caffeine
- Napping in the late afternoon and early evening

What you can do

- Keep bedroom cool and quiet.
- Ensure mattress is firm and comfortable.
- Do not nap in late afternoon/early evening and limit daytime naps to 15 minutes or less.
- Learn relaxation techniques.
- A normal sleeping pattern for older adults is six hours per night, awakening twice during the night, with 20 minutes to go back to sleep.
- If you can't sleep after 20 to 40 minutes, get up and do something quiet, for example, read a book or listen to music.
- Get more exercise daily. Try to go outside and walk for 20 minutes a day.
- Limit alcohol as it reduces the amount of restful sleep you get.
- Talk with someone you trust about feeling anxious or sad.
- Talk about your problem with a health care professional, your community nurse, pharmacist or family doctor.



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8. Shortness of Breath: What can cause shortness of breath?

- Smoking
- Lack of physical activity
- Obesity
- Pollution
- Allergies/asthma
- Heart problems
- Lung, respiratory infections, or chronic diseases such as bronchitis, emphysema

What you can do

- Cut down or stop smoking with help from family, friends, education programs.
- Try to stay away from places where air is polluted—like smoking areas.
- Get your annual flu shot and one-time pneumonia vaccine to prevent severe respiratory infections.
- Gradually get more physical activity—walk a block or join a fitness program.
- Eat healthy, nutritious meals.
- Talk with your doctor about shortness of breath and why it is occurring, when it happens, how it limits your activities.

9. Hazards in the Home: Why don't people remove hazards?

- Procrastination, the human tendency to put things off
- Difficulty making changes
- People may be reluctant to ask for assistance
- People do not always stop and think about the safety of their home

What you can do

- Plan a time to check your home for hazards.
- Have an occupational therapist review your home to give recommendations to improve and help you remain safe and independent.
- Ask for assistance to make repairs or renovations.
- Check with local services if assistance is available.



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10. Need for Special Equipment or Help with Day-to-Day Activities

Why don't people have the assistance they may need?

- Often people do not want to appear that they need special assistance.
- People think that special equipment or asking for assistance will make them less independent.
- The ability to complete tasks independently can vary from day to day if there is a change in health status.
- It may be difficult to make the required changes—for example, a senior may need assistance to move items.
- People don't always stop and think about the safety of their actions.

What you can do

- If you notice a significant change in your ability to complete activities, see your doctor to review your health status.
- Ensure that special devices are kept within close reach.
- Remind yourself that using special equipment or getting assistance will help you to remain more independent by avoiding a serious injury.
- Ensure that you receive training in the use of any special equipment from an occupational or physiotherapist to be certain that you are using it safely.



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11. Alcohol Overuse

What Can Cause Overuse of Alcohol?

- Using alcohol to aid sleep (alcohol actually disturbs normal sleeping patterns)
- Using alcohol to relieve aches and pains (alcohol can cause greater aches and pains)
- Loneliness
- Sadness or depression
- Grief and loss
- Boredom
- Stressful situations

MYTH:

Alcohol tolerance is the same throughout life.

FACT:

Aging decreases your tolerance for alcohol.
Over-use can cause major health problems.

What you can do

- Keep a record of how much alcohol you drink and why you are using it.
- Learn about how your body responds differently with age.
- Find out whether your feelings are common so you can find healthy ways to deal with them.
- Share your feelings with someone you trust such as a family member, friend, or peer counsellor.
- If you are feeling sad or nervous, do not feel like eating, or start losing interest in your activities, then talk with the community nurse, a peer counsellor or your family doctor.
- Join a community group or activity.
- Tell your doctor about your aches and pains and discuss ways to manage the problem.
- Talk with societies or groups that are trained to counsel on alcohol misuse.