

Preventing Falls

More than one-third of Canada's elderly population (ages 65 and older) fall each year. It's estimated that 50% of those who fall will suffer moderate to severe injuries such as sprains, hip fractures, or head traumas that can permanently reduce their mobility and independence.

Direct health care costs relating to falls among seniors in Canada are estimated at \$1 billion every year

This accounts for 84% of injury-related admissions to hospitals, 40% of all admissions to nursing homes, and a 10% increase in home-care services. posture and bad habits.

More than 90% of incidents that result in injuries are predictable and preventable. Studies show that modifying the home and reducing hazards in the community can reduce the risk of falls by half. Impaired vision or mental functioning, along with medications, are other risk factors.

Physiotherapy Can Help

Physiotherapists not only treat injuries, they also teach you how to prevent the onset of pain or injury that can limit your activity. A physiotherapist can help evaluate the home environment to identify objects that thought-out furniture arrangement can also help prevent unnecessary accidents.

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Physiotherapy Can Help (cont)

A physiotherapist will review a senior's medical history and determine general physical condition, and will conduct a series of tests specifically designed to measure strength, flexibility, balance and gait (the way each person walks). After determining any limitations, a program of exercises and activities will be prescribed that focus on that area but with an overall goal of improving physical function and mobility.

If required, a physiotherapist may also use treatment to increase range of motion and flexibility. These may include electrical stimulation, massage, hydrotherapy, heat, cold and ultrasound.

In the event that poor balance is caused by damage to the inner ear, and there are additional symptoms such as vertigo, dizziness, or nausea, a physiotherapist may also prescribe a vestibular rehabilitation program that will correct the inner ear response to changes in position.

Many seniors imprison themselves in their homes from a fear of falling. By doing this, they lose the physical benefits of normal activities and may compromise balance and muscle strength, putting themselves at even greater risk of falling even at home. A targeted physiotherapy treatment program can help maintain or regain strength, flexibility and endurance in a way that still feels safe and secure.



The Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) represents physiotherapists, physiotherapist assistants and physiotherapist students across Canada. CPA members are rehabilitation professionals dedicated to the health, mobility and fitness of Canadians.

Physiotherapists are primary health care professionals who combine their in-depth knowledge of the body and how it works with specialized hands-on clinical skills to assess, diagnose and treat symptoms of illness, injury or disability.

More than 20,000 registered physiotherapists work in Canada, in private clinics, general and rehabilitation hospitals, community health centres, residential care and assisted-living facilities, home visit agencies, workplaces, and schools.

Tips to reduce the risk of falling:

- Plant both feet securely on the ground before getting out of the car;
- Wear a good pair of lace-up walking shoes that will support your feet and provide necessary cushioning for your joints; this will make walking safer and more comfortable.
- Avoid high heels, slippers, and open-toed sandals, which can cause you to trip;
- Use aids for walking, balancing, hearing and seeing – view them as sources of strength to help you do things, not signs of weakness;
- In winter, before taking the garbage out to the sidewalk, sprinkle kitty litter, an abrasive cleaner or salt and sand to the curb. It might also help to sprinkle some on the ground before getting out of the car;
- Make sure the tips on canes and crutches are large and spiked for icy conditions;
- Sit rather than stand while dressing;
- Before you get up out of a chair or up from bed, wait 10 seconds before rising to your feet to prevent dizziness;
- Install handrails and grab-bars in the bathrooms and stairways;
- Make sure stairways are well lit. Install a night light at the top of the stairs;
- Concentrate on what you're doing while you're doing it, and move at a speed that feels comfortable;
- Immediately wipe up any spills, especially on ceramic floors;
- Keep a flashlight near the bed in case the power goes out;
- Avoid taking unnecessary risks like standing on furniture. Instead, use a sturdy stepladder, or better yet, ask for help;
- Put everyday items on the bottom shelf;
- Avoid hyper extending the neck. Extending the neck backwards can cut off circulation to the brain, causing a blackout or even stroke. When visiting the hairdresser, ask for an extra towel roll for the back of your neck;
- Manage medications properly and avoid consuming alcohol when taking medications;
- Be mindful around pets. Feet can get caught in leashes, dogs can knock you down or you can trip over the sleeping or wandering pet;
- Slow down. Be conscious of risky situations and hazardous areas;
- Remove reading glasses when walking;