

# Falls Prevention Toolkit 2020

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This material is intended for the clients at Compass Community Health and those participating in *Finding Your Balance* and *Staying Balanced*. Information in this booklet is not medical advice. Please speak to your healthcare provider for guidance regarding your medical care.



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# Falls Prevention Toolkit

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# Falls Prevention Toolkit

This toolkit is intended for the clients at Compass Community Health and those participating in *Finding Your Balance* and *Staying Balanced*.



For the purpose of providing accessible educational material to clients like you, we have developed this toolkit that includes all kinds of great information about falls prevention, including things that can cause us to fall and things we can do to prevent them!

***“Falling can lead to concern about future falls, while perceiving a risk of a fall may lead [people] to reduce their participation in activities that help build strength, balance, confidence and self-esteem.”***

*Statistics Canada*

## GET THE FACTS

**1 in 3 seniors** aged 65 and older are concerned about future falls

**20-30%** of seniors experience 1+ falls **EACH YEAR**

Falling contributes to **85%** of seniors' injury-related **HOSPITALIZATIONS**

Falls cause **95%** of all **HIP FRACTURES**

Over **1/3** of seniors are admitted to **LONG TERM CARE** following hospitalization for a fall

The average Canadian senior stays in hospital **10 DAYS** longer for falls than for any other cause

Falls can result in chronic pain, reduced mobility, loss of independence and even death

**50%** of all falls causing hospitalization **HAPPEN AT HOME**

About **30%** of seniors have an inaccurate perception of their falls risk by either **OVERESTIMATING** or **UNDERESTIMATING** their falls risks. <sup>1, 2</sup>

## Assessing Your Falls Risk...

### Have you or do you...

### Why it matters...

Fallen in the past year?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> 2	No 0	People who have fallen once likely fall again unless the cause is identified and managed
Use or have been advised to use a cane or walker to get around safely?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> 2	No 0	People who have been advised to use a cane or walker may already be more likely to fall.
Sometimes feel unsteady when you are walking?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> 1	No 0	Unsteadiness or needing support while walking are signs of poor balance.
Steady yourself by holding onto furniture when walking at home	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> 1	No 0	“Furniture surfing” is often a good early indicator that someone doesn’t feel steady.
Worry or anxious about falling?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> 1	No 0	People who are worried about falling are more likely to fall because of lack of confidence.
Need to push with your hands to stand up from a chair?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> 1	No 0	This is a sign of weak leg muscles, a major reason for falling.
Have some trouble stepping up onto a curb?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> 1	No 0	This is also a sign of weak leg muscles that can be a major reason for falling
Often have to rush to the toilet?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> 1	No 0	Rushing to the bathroom, especially at night, increases your chance of falling
Have lost some or all feeling in your feet?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> 1	No 0	Foot numbness and how our feet feel can cause stumbles and lead to falls
Take a medication that sometimes makes you feel light-headed or more tired than usual?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> 1	No 0	These medications can sometimes increase your risk of falling
Often feel sad or depressed?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> 1	No 0	Symptoms of depression, such as trouble thinking straight and planning ahead can lead to falls
<b>Add up the number of points for each “Yes” answer...</b>	<b>Total</b> _____		<b>If you scored <u>4 points or more</u> you may be at risk for falling.</b>

This checklist was developed by the Greater Los Angeles VA Geriatric Research Education Clinical Center.<sup>3</sup>

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# 1. Fear of Falling

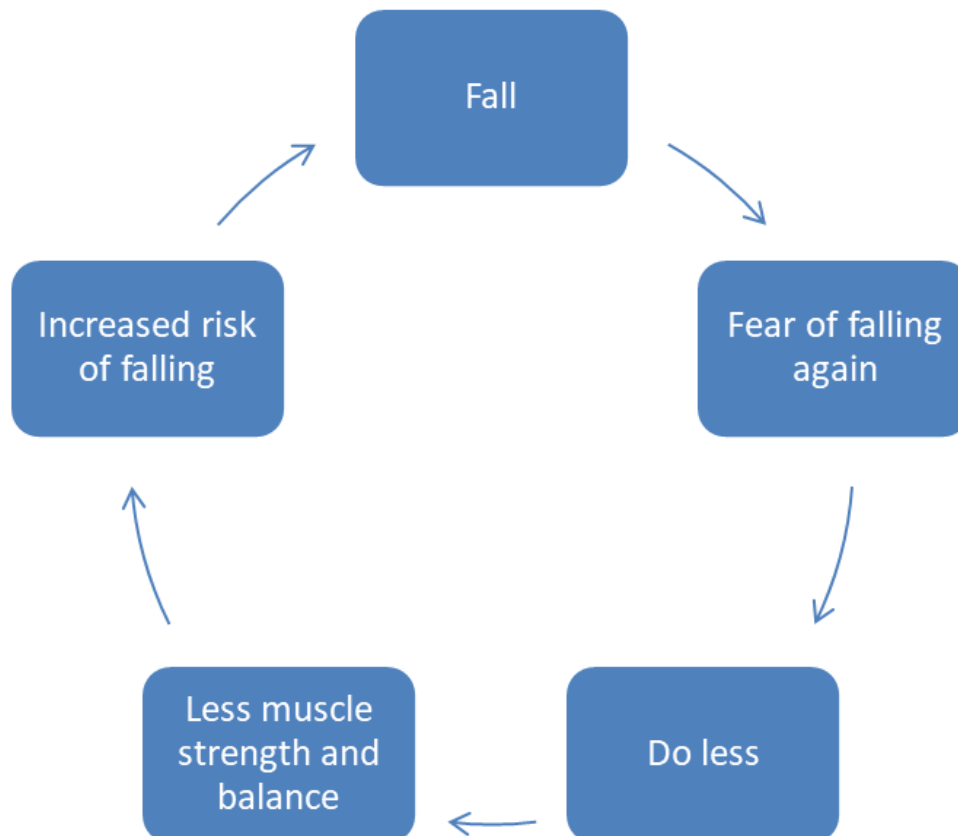
The fear of falling is a serious concern for many people and may keep them from going out or doing the things they want or love to do. Or maybe, you have had a fall in the past and are afraid the next one may be worse. These feelings are very normal but the fear of falling itself can increase your chances of having a fall if you allow yourself to become inactive.<sup>4</sup>



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Fear of falling can create a cycle that can be difficult to break without help. Do you relate to the cycle below? Find ways to overcome fear on the **next page!**

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# Fear of Falling

What will not help your fear of falling...



**Staying indoors** and avoiding going for a walk for fear of having another fall



**Avoiding social activities** that require travel outside of the house



Choosing **not to use a cane or a walker** because you think it makes you look more dependent or “old”



**Thinking frequently** about the dangers of a second fall

What you can try to do instead...



**Exercising** to improve your strength and balance



Participating in **social activities** such as dancing, gardening, and stretching to improve flexibility and balance



**Use a cane or walker** to maintain your independence and be sure they are fitted and used correctly



Returning to **regular routines** after a fall as soon as possible



**Learning** about things you can do to prevent another fall from happening

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## 2. Illness



How we feel affects our balance and our risk of falling.

1. chronic illness (diabetes, heart disease, arthritis)
2. feeling sick (flu, cold, etc.)
3. feeling stressed (anxiety, trouble sleeping, etc.)

...all increase your risk of falls!

### How does illness impact falls?

- You may be surprised by a sudden onset of symptoms such as dizziness or weakness.
- When feeling unwell, your attention might be drawn to your symptoms rather than the task at hand.
- Extended periods of illness can require time in bed which can cause weakness
- You may feel reluctant to decline an activity due to the fact that you are feeling unwell, especially if others are depending on you.
- It can be difficult to adjust your activity level and find a balance between getting the rest you need to get better and remaining as active as possible.

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### Check in with yourself right now...

- ✗ Have an ongoing illness that affects your lifestyle?
- ✗ Tire easily or not rested upon waking up?
- ✗ Experience pain due to a chronic illness or condition?
- ✗ Feel unwell all of a sudden?



- ✓ Adjust your activity level accordingly
- ✓ Ask for help if you need it; use a meal delivery, housecleaning or grocery service.
- ✓ Keep items close to the bedside to avoid unnecessary ventures out of bed
- ✓ Increase your activity level gradually
- ✓ Visit your doctor to monitor your illnesses/conditions
- ✓ Eat a healthy diet
- ✓ Drink plenty of fluids

### 3. Dizziness

When we become dizzy, we may lose our balance and/or fall more easily.

#### Preventing dizziness...

- ✔ Sitting at the side of the bed for a few minutes before you stand up.
- ✔ After standing, pause and take one slow, deep breath. Wait for the dizziness to pass before taking a step.
- ✔ Have your blood pressure checked regularly.
- ✔ Tell your doctor if your medication is making you drowsy or dizzy. If you cannot get a hold of your doctor, talk to a pharmacist you trust and who knows you.
- ✔ Have your ears checked regularly.
- ✔ Eat a meal or snack every 4-6 hours.
- ✔ Drink plenty of fluids throughout the day, especially if you are not feeling well.

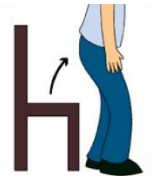
#### Need more information?

Click on one of the topics below to learn more!



### COMMON CAUSES OF DIZZINESS

Standing up too quickly from sitting or from lying down



Low or high blood pressure



Dehydration



Medication side effects



Inner ear problems



Low blood Sugar<sup>5</sup>

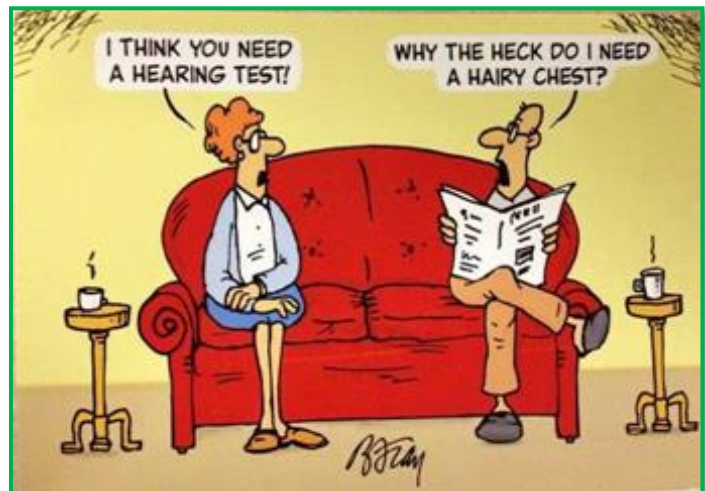




## 4. Hearing & Vision

### Hearing

Our ears and our hearing both play a big role in balance and falling...



1. Our ears have two jobs: hearing AND maintaining our balance.
2. As we age, the structures inside our ear start to change and may not function as well as they once did.
3. Your ability to pick up sounds decreases. You may also have problems maintaining your balance as you sit, stand, and walk because of challenges with your inner ear.
4. Age-related hearing loss affects both ears. Hearing may decline, especially of high-frequency sounds. This is important in terms of falls because, being able to hear sounds within our environment can have a big impact on our safety (for example, hearing traffic or someone coming up behind you).
5. You may also have trouble differentiating between certain sounds. Or you may have problems understanding others when there is background noise.
6. If you are having trouble hearing, discuss your symptoms with your health care provider in order to find ways to manage hearing loss.
7. Persistent, abnormal ear noise, called tinnitus is another common problem in older adults. Cause of tinnitus may include wax buildup or medicines that are harmful to the structures inside the ear. If you have tinnitus, talk with your health care provider.<sup>6</sup>

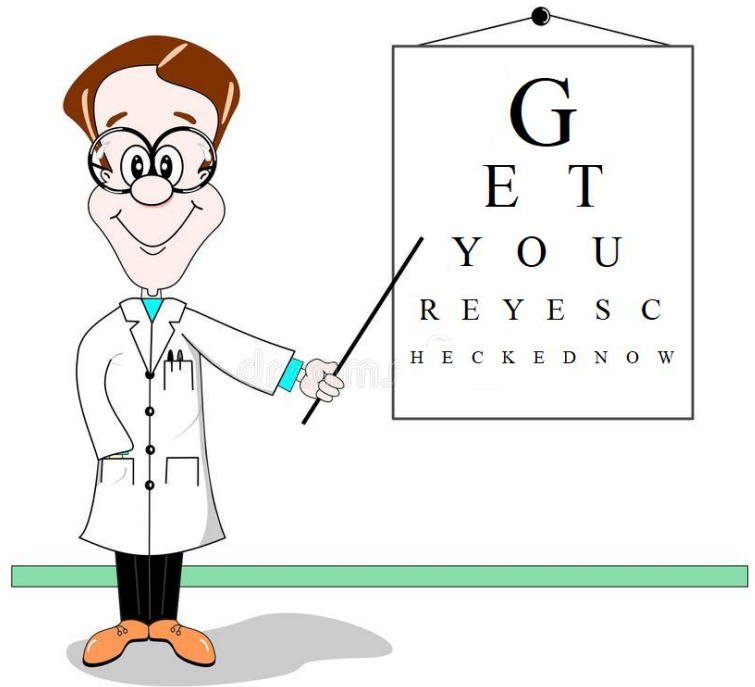
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# Hearing & Vision

## Vision

As we age, our vision changes...

- We become more sensitive to glare.
- We need more light to see at night.  
People who are over 60 need 10 times more light to see at night than teenagers.
- It takes our eyes longer to adjust to sudden light changes.
- It becomes harder to judge distance and depth. We need this depth perception when we are going up and down stairs and curbs.<sup>7</sup>



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## What you can do...

- ☑ It is so important to have your vision checked **yearly**.
- ☑ If you wear bi-focals, the line where the prescription changes can change the clarity of your vision. You need to be careful when on stairs and curbs. You need to tip your head down and look out of the top to see better.
- ☑ If possible, avoid wearing bifocals when walking and on the stairs.
- ☑ Remember to clean your glasses frequently.
- ☑ Be sure your home is well-lit. Consider using a night light.
- ☑ A nightlight for an 8 hour night is only \$10.00/year.
- ☑ Be cautious if walking outside at night as you may not see obstacles as easily.<sup>7,8</sup>




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## 5. Stress & Hurrying

In today's world, stress is becoming common in daily life. In order to fit in everything that you need to do, want to do, and are expected to do, everyday tasks are often rushed and may even be completed while you are operating on "autopilot" without paying attention to the environment. When you are feeling stressed or are hurrying to complete tasks, you are more likely to fall.<sup>9, 10</sup>

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### How stress and/or hurrying can make us fall...

- 
- ✗ Our minds tend to wander and stops us from staying present
  - ✗ We think about the source of our stress instead of the task at hand  
(Example: getting into the shower)
  - ✗ We are more likely to miss important changes in the environment  
(Example: walking from carpet to hard wood)
  - ✗ We don't take time to assess whether something we are doing is safe
  - ✗ We can become overtired, which increases falls

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## Stress & Hurrying

### What can I do to stay safe while feeling stressed?

- ✓ Plan ahead (make “to do” lists)
- ✓ Focus on one task at a time
- ✓ Prioritize your tasks and stay focused
- ✓ Use proper equipment for tasks, even if it takes longer
- ✓ Do not rush to answer the phone or attend to non-urgent tasks
- ✓ Leave early for appointments
- ✓ Look where you are going, try not to be distracted or to rush
- ✓ Learn to say no to less important activities
- ✓ Plan time in your day for self-care and doing the things you love to help you stress less



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## Mindful Moving

As many as 50% of falls in older adults occur while walking.

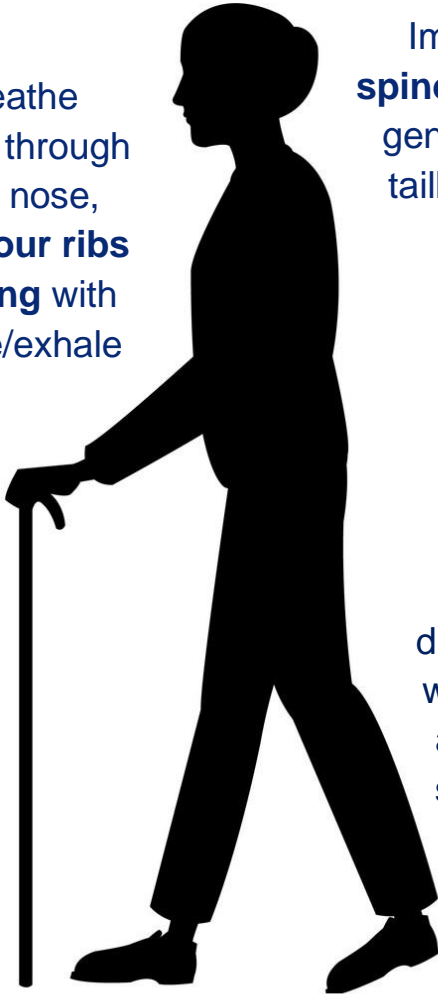
Throughout the day we may never ask ourselves whether we're walking safely. When we are stressed, rushing, multi-tasking, and distracted we're less likely to be aware of those broken sidewalks, uneven surfaces, cracks in the pavement, that last staircase step. Applying mindfulness may help reduce falls.<sup>11</sup>



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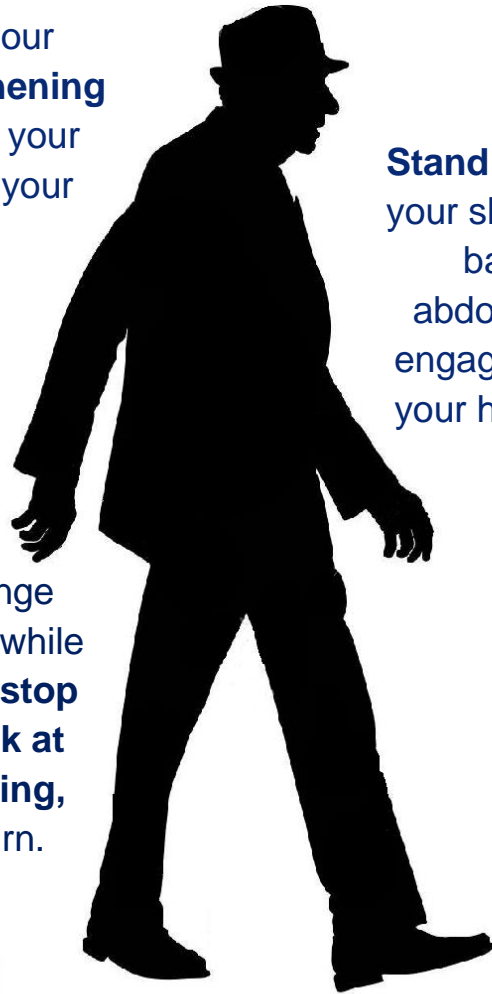
## Simple Steps to Mindful Moving

Breathe gently through your nose, **feel your ribs moving** with inhale/exhale



Imagine your **spine lengthening** gently from your tailbone to your neck

To change direction while walking, **stop and look at something**, then turn.



**Stand tall** with your shoulders back, abdominals engaged, and your head up.

**Walk heel-to-toe.** Strike the heel of the foot on the ground and press through to your toes. Make sure your **feet are hip-width apart.**

Want help being mindful and managing stress? [Click here](#) to learn about Compass Community Health's Mental Wellness Toolkits and groups that you can join!

You can also contact Compass Community Health at (905) 523-6611

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## Stress & Hurrying

### The Busy Bladder

- ✗ Dashing to the bathroom?
- ✗ Getting up at night to go to the bathroom?
- ✗ Going often to the bathroom during the day or night?



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Doing these things can increase your chance of falling if you try to get to the bathroom too quickly.

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### What can I do to stay safe despite the “busy bladder”?

- ✓ While the busy bladder is a concern, it is still important to drink enough water or other fluids each day. Drink 6-8 glasses or as recommended by your healthcare provider (if you have heart failure, take water pills, or have other serious health problems, talk to your doctor first).
- ✓ Drink most of your fluids during the day; cut down on how much you drink in the evening.
- ✓ Cut down on how much tea, coffee, diet soft drinks, or alcohol you drink; they can act like a water pill and increase how often you need to urinate
- ✓ Wear clothing that is easy to take on and off.
- ✓ Try to go to the bathroom regularly throughout the day (about every 2-3 hours).
- ✓ Speak with your doctor if you feel that you are going to the bathroom more often than usual
- ✓ Consider assistive devices beside the bed (e.g., bedside urinal or bedside commode if this is a significant concern for you).

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## 5. Footwear & Care

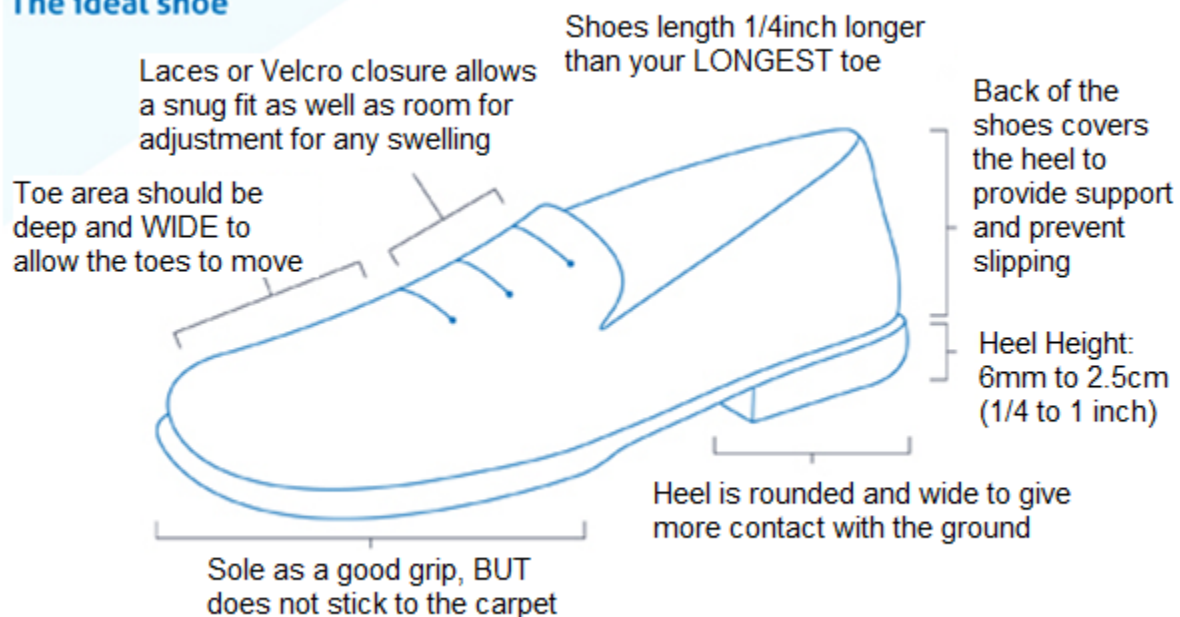
### Footwear

Unsafe footwear or common foot problems, such as corns, calluses or ingrown toenails, can upset your balance and even change how you walk, increasing your falls risk.<sup>1, 12</sup>

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- ✔ Wear well-fitting shoes that provide support and allow room if your feet swell.
  - ✔ Buy new shoes when the tread wears off.
  - ✔ Buy shoes late in the day, as your feet may be slightly more swollen and the largest that they will typically be.
  - ✔ Have your feet measured for the correct size every time you buy shoes
  - ✔ Avoid walking in bare feet, stocking feet, or floppy slippers with an open heel
  - ✔ Consider wearing supportive shoes in your home
  - ✔ Socks and slippers keep your feet warm, but socks can also be a fall hazard.
    - Wear slippers only if they have a back and non-slip sole
    - Socks with non-slip grips may be a good option. Regular socks can slip!<sup>13</sup>
- 

#### The ideal shoe



*Ideal Shoe from Finding Balance Ontario<sup>13</sup>*

# Footwear & Care

## Footcare

If your feet are sore, nail care is poor, or if you have foot problems, the way you walk can change. Feet that are healthy and pain free can help you keep your balance.

- ✔ Check your feet often for corns, open sores, redness, dry skin and thickened nails. Ask for help or use a mirror if needed
- ✔ Wash your feet in warm, not hot water.
- ✔ Dry your feet completely after washing, especially between your toes.
- ✔ Trim your toenails straight across and not too short.
- ✔ Address swollen feet by putting them upon a stool when you sit down.
- ✔ See a healthcare professional if you have diabetes, or if you sense pain or any changes in your feet.<sup>13</sup>



*Inspecting Your Feet from Columbus Regional Health<sup>14</sup>*



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## Footwear & Care

### Neuropathy

Neuropathy is damage of the nerves that leads to numbness and/or tingling, typically in the legs and feet. You may also experience pain. Causes of neuropathy include medication, low vitamin levels, and diseases such as diabetes. Neuropathy increases your chance of falling because it prevents you from receiving proper messages from your feet.<sup>15</sup>



- 
- ✓ Use your eyes to tell you what your legs/feet are doing
  - ✓ Be cautious about clutter in your path and changes to the walking surface
  - ✓ Watch where you are going especially when walking in an unfamiliar environment or on stairs
  - ✓ Wear appropriate footwear – even in the house if your neuropathy is severe
- 

You can see different foot care providers for your foot care needs such as podiatrists, chiropodists or a foot care nurse. You may be eligible to see a Compass foot care provider if you are living with diabetes!

Click to learn about Compass Community Health 'Feet First' program and eligibility. Already a client? Call to book your next appointment if you have not already!

**Contact Compass Community Health at (905) 523-6611**

## 6. Medication

Medications include:

- Prescriptions
- Over-the-counter pills
- Vitamins
- Herbal supplements.



The average older adult uses 6 prescription medications, and 3 over-the-counter medications or supplements which when used together can increase the risk of a fall.

Medications that relax you, help you sleep, or improve your mood can increase your risk of falling.

**Polypharmacy is considered a leading cause of falls<sup>16</sup>**

When you are prescribed a new medication or if you have a current medication you are not sure of, ask your pharmacist and doctor the following questions:

1. What is the medication used for?
2. When and how should I take it?
3. How long do I need to take it?
4. What are the side effects?
5. Will it increase my chance of falling?
6. What should I do if I have *a side effect*?
7. What should I do if I *miss a dose*?
8. How should my medication be stored?
9. Will it affect any of the other medication I am taking?
10. Should I avoid any food or beverages?
11. What needs to be done to monitor this medication?<sup>17</sup>



## SIDE EFFECTS THAT MAY LEAD TO FALLS

Dizziness



Drowsiness



Weakness



Confusion



Slowed Reaction



Fainting



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## Medication

### What can you do to safely manage your medications?

- ✔ Talk to your pharmacist and doctor if pills make you drowsy or dizzy.  
They may need to change the type, dose, or time of day you take them.
- ✔ Alcohol affects medications. Be careful. Talk to your doctor and pharmacist.
- ✔ Use only one pharmacy to fill prescriptions. It is important that your pharmacist knows all the medications you take to predict side-effects.
- ✔ Keep a current medication list in your wallet and at home. Review them yearly with your pharmacist and doctor.
- ✔ Only use your prescribed medications, never someone else's.
- ✔ Check the expiry date and return outdated medications to your pharmacist.
- ✔ If you take 3 or more medications for chronic conditions (diabetes, COPD, congestive heart failure) you are eligible for a free Meds Check with a pharmacist.

#### **Meds Check Program**

This is a program allows you to sit down with your pharmacist on a yearly basis and review the medications that you are taking, monitor for side effects, check to make sure that your medications can be taken together, and to help you remember to take your medications. **Click here to learn more!**

- ✔ Be sure to schedule a visit with your family physician if you have been in the hospital. Changes in medications are often made when you are in the hospital or when you are discharged and it is important to have the doctor that knows you best review these changes.
- ✔ Keep things simple with your medications. Remember that medications are not just for fixing problems, but to also help you feel better and improve your quality of life. If you are having side effects, report them to your doctor or pharmacist. If you feel that you are taking too many medications, discuss your concerns with your doctor.<sup>17</sup>

# Medication

## Medications and Side Effects that may Increase Risk of Falling

Minimizing Drug Side Effects Chart originating from Hamilton Falls Prevention Task Force<sup>18</sup>

DRUGS USED FOR...	SIDE EFFECTS THAT MAY INCREASE FALLING	HOW TO MINIMIZE RISK OF FALLING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blood Pressure</li> <li>Angina</li> <li>Parkinson's Disease</li> <li>Urine Output</li> <li>Constipation</li> <li>Heart Rate and/or Rhythm</li> </ul>	<p>All can cause blood pressure to become too low, especially when getting up quickly from sitting or lying down, causing dizziness or fainting.</p> <p>Additionally, mineral loss from diuretics (water pills) and over use of laxatives can also cause weakness, especially in leg muscles.</p> <p>Heart rate can become too slow or regular rhythm is not maintained with the last group of medications.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stand up slowly after sitting or lying down.</li> <li>If lying down, sit up first, remain seated for a few minutes, then stand slowly.</li> <li>If possible, monitor blood pressure and heart rate at home.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allergies/Cold Symptoms</li> <li>Anxiety</li> <li>Depression</li> <li>Pain</li> <li>Sleep</li> </ul>	<p>Can cause drowsiness, confusion, slowing of reactions, imbalance and lack of coordination, especially if taking medicine from more than one of these groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoid over-the-counter (OTC) antihistamines if possible.</li> <li>Do not take more than one type of pain or anti-inflammatory medication unless specifically directed by your doctor.</li> <li>Do not mix with alcohol</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blood Sugar</li> </ul>	<p>Blood sugar can become too low causing confusion, weakness, fainting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor blood sugars as directed.</li> <li>Keep an appropriate source of sugar handy</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blood Clotting Problems</li> </ul>	<p>Excessive decrease in ability to form blood clots can cause bleeding, leading to anemia, weakness, and dizziness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report abnormal bleeding such as bruising easily, unusual bleeding around the gums, blood in urine or rectal blood to the doctor at once.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pain</li> </ul>	<p>Stomach irritation can cause bleeding leading to dizziness and fainting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do not take more than one type of pain or anti-inflammatory medication unless directed by doctor.</li> <li>Do not take aspirin with other types of anti-inflammatory</li> <li>Do not mix with alcohol</li> </ul>



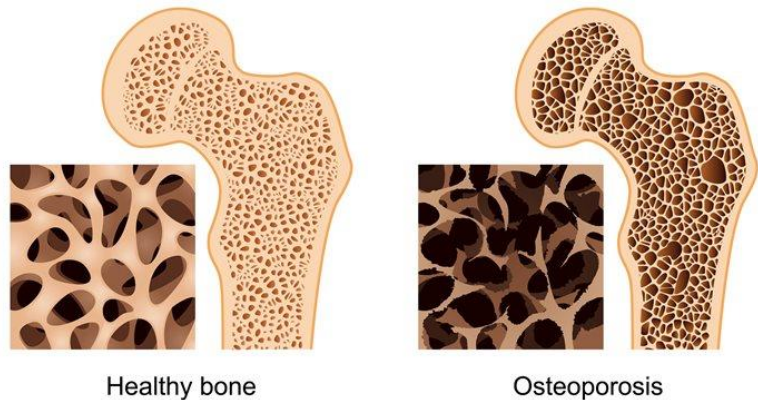
If you are concerned that side effects of medication that you are taking may increase your risk of falling, **consult your physician before making changes**

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## 7. Osteoporosis

### What is it?

Osteoporosis is a condition in which the bones become weak and porous. It is a condition that can lead to an increased risk of fractures, or broken bones. It is often called a “silent condition”

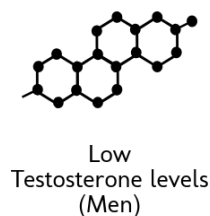
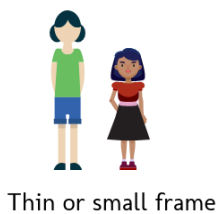


because it can be present

without any symptoms until a fracture occurs. Osteoporosis can increase your risk of having a fall. Falls can also increase your likelihood of fracturing the hip, wrist, spine, or another part of the skeleton, especially if you have osteoporosis.<sup>19</sup>

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### Osteoporosis Risk Factors



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## Osteoporosis Risk Factors Continues...

- Gender: your chances of developing osteoporosis are greater if you are a woman
- Age: as you age, your risk of osteoporosis increases; bone loss builds over time and bones become weaker as you age
- Family history: osteoporosis and fractures appear to be, in part, hereditary. People whose parents have a history of fractures also tend to have reduced bone mass and an increased risk for fractures.
- Diet: diets low in calcium or vitamin D can increase your risk of osteoporosis and fractures. Excessive dieting or inadequate intake can be bad for bone health
- Medications: long-term use of certain medications, can lead to bone loss – this is something that can be discussed with your pharmacist or family doctor
- An inactive lifestyle: Low levels of physical activity can contribute to an increased rate of bone loss. <sup>19</sup>

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## What can you do?

- Speak with your family doctor to determine if you could be at risk for osteoporosis
- Eat a balanced diet, rich in Calcium and Vitamin D. If available to you, speak to your pharmacist who knows you and a dietician to see how to best do this for you
- Remain physically active. Develop an exercise plan and stick to it, to keep your bones strong.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle. Try to avoid smoking and drinking alcohol excessively
- Have your medications reviewed with your doctor and/or pharmacist
- Use all of the falls prevention strategies that we have discussed in this class to prevent a fall from taking place 😊
- Learn more** about osteoporosis by **clicking on the Osteoporosis Canada logo** to your right or visit their website at [www.osteoporosis.ca](http://www.osteoporosis.ca).



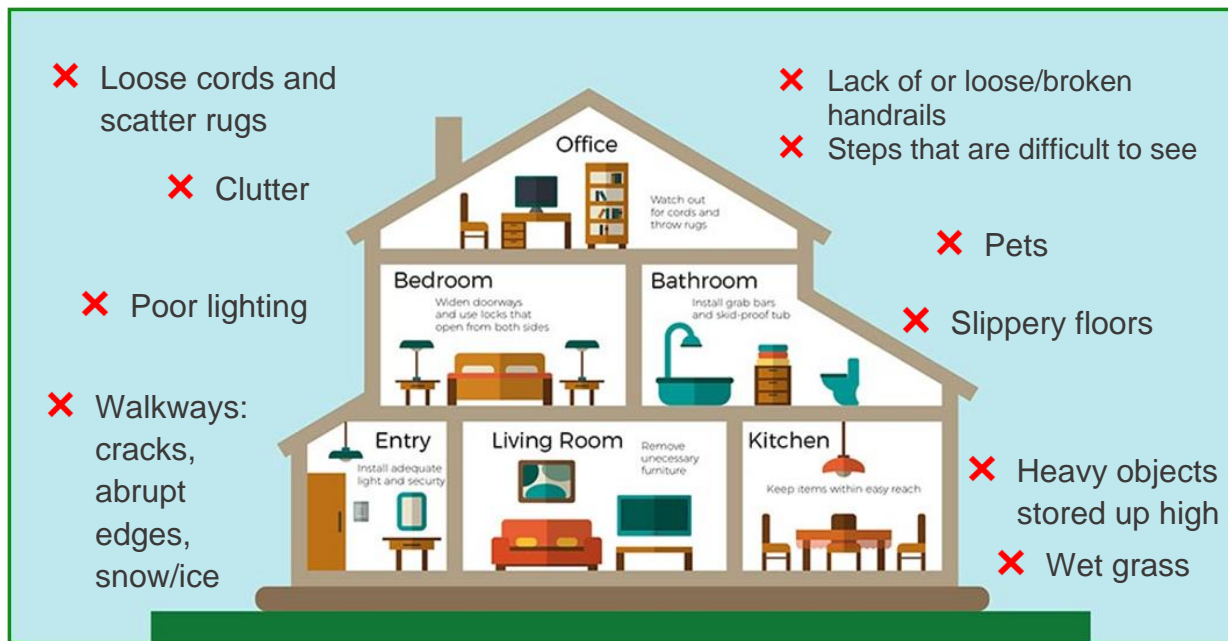
Osteoporosis Canada

Ostéoporose Canada

## 8. Home Safety & Modifications

Home is the most common place to fall. Factors such as lighting and the placement of furniture and objects in your home can increase your chance of falling.<sup>20</sup> You can often make some simple and inexpensive changes to make your home safer and reduce your risk of falls.

### Common Household Hazards...



### Common Room Hazards...

#### Bathroom



- ✓ Slippery tub/bathmat not properly put in (need to put in tub while it is dry)
- ✓ Getting in and out of the tub
- ✓ Use of a towel rack to stabilize self/inappropriately installed grab bars
  - Ensure grab bars are anchored well (installed into studs)
- ✓ Difficulty getting on/off the toilet
- ✓ Difficulty standing in the shower
- ✓ Wet floor: wipe up moisture/use a bath mat
- ✓ Install a night light

- ✓ Clutter
- ✓ Loose cords (tuck into baseboards or secure)
- ✓ Loose rugs (remove or secure with two-sided tape)
- ✓ No phone/lamp by the bed
- ✓ No speed dial for emergency numbers
- ✓ Inadequate lighting
- ✓ Cluttered pathways/no room to move around furniture
- ✓ Unstable furniture and lamps
- ✓ Living alone (think about using a buddy call System to check in)

## Living Room/ Bedroom



## Kitchen



- ✓ Items hard to reach (keep frequently used items in easy to reach places)
- ✓ Heavy items in high cupboards (better to put in low cupboards)
- ✓ Standing on a chair to reach items (use a step stool instead)
- ✓ Taking unnecessary risks (ask for help)
- ✓ Wet floors (wipe up spills)

- ✓ Ensure stairs and outdoor areas are well lit
- ✓ Install railing (preferably bilateral railings), mount them at the right height and into studs)
- ✓ Ensure that you can see the edges of the stairs (apply reflective tape or add coloured edging)
- ✓ It's ideal to have a light switch at the top and the bottom of the stairways
- ✓ Free of clutter, snow and leaves
- ✓ Best if balconies etc. have a low sill at the threshold
- ✓ Install mailbox at an appropriate height
- ✓ Ensure that your house number is clear and well lit (so that emergency vehicles can find your home)
- ✓ Do not walk on wet grass
- ✓ Place a bench or chair in your entranceway so that you can sit to put on shoes

## Stairs/ Exterior



Adapted from *Finding Balance Ontario Home Safety Guide for Older Adults* <sup>21</sup>



# Home Safety & Modifications

## Complete Your Home Safety Checklist!

	Yes	No	If yes, what can I do?
When you walk through a room, do you have to walk around furniture?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ask someone to move the furniture so your path is clear
Do you have throw rugs on the floor?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Remove carpets or rugs that present a trip hazard or use double-sided tape to secure them to the floor
Are there objects or clutter on the floor, walkways, or in the stairwells?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Clear clutter from walkways and stairs. Always keep objects off the floor or stairs.
Do you have to walk over or around wires or cords (like lamp, telephone, or extension cords)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coil or tape cords and wires next to the wall so you can't trip over them. If needed, have an electrician put in another outlet.
Is your carpet loose or torn?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Make sure carpet is firmly attached to the floor and every stair or remove the carpet and attach non-slip rubber treads to the stairs.
Are some stairs throughout your house broken or uneven?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fix loose or uneven steps.
Are you missing a light over the stairway? Or has the light bulb burnt out?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Have an electrician put in an overhead light at the top and bottom of the stairs. Have a friend or family member change the light bulb.
Do you have only one light switch for your stairs (only at the top or at the bottom of the stairs)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Have an electrician put in a light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs. You can get light switches that glow.
Are the handrails loose or broken? Is the handrail on only one side of the stairs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fix loose handrails or put new ones in. Make sure handrails are on both sides of the stairs.

	Yes	No	
Are items in the kitchen or bathroom that you use often on high shelves?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Move items in your cabinets. Keep things you use often on the lower shelves (around waist height).
Is the tub or shower floor slippery?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Put a non-slip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor of the tub or shower.
Do you need some support when you get in and out of the tub or up from the toilet?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Have grab bars installed next to and inside the tub and/or next to the toilet.
Is the light near your bed hard to reach?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Place a lamp close to the bed where it is easy to reach.
Is the path from your bed to the bathroom dark?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Install nightlights in the bedroom, bathroom and hallways. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Some night-lights go on after dark.
Is there enough light to see where I am going? Are lights glare-free?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Increase the wattage of light bulbs in your whole house, especially at the top and bottom of the stairs
Are the walkways free from cracks, holes, leaves, and debris?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Repair and remove debris from outdoor sidewalks and steps
Do you always keep one hand free for the handrail, even when carrying something?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Before you go up and down the stairs, plan out what items you will carry so that you always have one hand free to hold on to the railing
Is your telephone easy to reach? Do you have emergency phone numbers listed by the phone?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Make use of a portable phone or ensure that you can easily reach a telephone in each room
Do you use a step stool for reaching high places? Is it stable and secure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Use a ladder or a secure step stool for reaching high items. Ensure that it is stable and secure.

Adapted from *Finding Balance Ontario Home Safety Guide for Older Adults* <sup>21</sup>



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# Home Safety & Modifications

## Modifications Vendors & Funding

Home modifications and assistive devices are only likely be helpful in decreasing falls if:

1. The cost of modifications/devices is low OR assistance is available to offset the cost
2. You are willing to make changes to the appearance of your home and/or use the assistive device



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## Home Safety & Modifications

### Modifications Vendors & Funding

#### March of Dimes

- ☑ Provides funding for devices that help adults live safely and independent in their homes, allow for discharge from a hospital or rehabilitation centre, help avoid job loss, or support opportunities for education, developmental and community activities
- ☑ You must have an ongoing physical limitation that requires the use of an assistive device/home modification AND you must be:
  - In financial need
  - 19 years of age or older
  - A permanent Ontario resident
- ☑ For more information **click on March of Dimes logo**  
OR visit <http://www.marchofdimes.ca>



#### Hamilton Special Supports Program

- ☑ Provides funding for assistive devices (bath aids, grab bars, toilet aids), custom foot orthotics, hospital beds, mobility aids, wheelchair batteries and repairs, eye glasses, bath equipment, and other services and special needs
- ☑ Persons receiving [Ontario Works](#) or [ODSP](#) may be eligible, along with individuals living on a low or fixed income
- ☑ You will need:
  - Last year's notice of assessment from Canada Revenue Agency
  - Copies of pay stubs (if applicable)
  - A letter of assessment from health professional
  - A quote from a preferred vendor
- ☑ For more information **click on City of Hamilton logo**  
Or visit <https://www.hamilton.ca/>



Have you found some home safety issues at home or would like help with equipment?  
Contact Compass Community Health to speak with an Occupational Therapist.

**You can contact Compass Community Health at (905) 523-6611**

## 9. Mobility Aids: Canes & Walkers

### Cane

### Walker

<b>Why you may need the device?</b>	Arthritis or pain, especially of the knees and hips, and on one side. Mild balance problems. Injuries to one foot or leg.	Arthritis or pain (especially of the knees and hips) on both sides. Moderate balance and gait problems. General/overall weakness or weakness of both legs.
<b>How much weight does it support?</b>	You can support up to 25% of your weight with a cane.	You can support up to half of your weight with some walkers.
<b>Funding</b>	OW, ODSP, WSIB, self	ADP (75%), ODSP, WSIB, self
<b>Most common types</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single point canes can help with early balance problems.</li> <li>• Four point or “quad” canes add more stability and help even more with balance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard walkers need to be picked up to move forward.</li> <li>• Front-wheeled walkers don’t need to be picked up so they use less energy.</li> <li>• Rolling 4-wheeled walkers give support and come with seats</li> </ul>
<b>Steps to Safe Use</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use the cane on the opposite side of your injury, pain, or weakness</li> <li>2. Put all of your weight on your good leg.</li> <li>3. Move the cane and your bad leg a comfortable distance forward.</li> <li>4. With your weight supported on both your cane and your bad leg, step through with your good leg.</li> <li>5. Do not place your cane too far ahead of you, or it could slip from under you.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When walking, keep walker close and <u>roll your walker one step’s length ahead of you</u>. If it is too far ahead of you, or it could roll away or hurt your back.</li> <li>2. If seat is available, put on breaks first (push to lock) then sit</li> <li>3. If a rollator type, squeezing the breaks when going downhill slows the walker-better control!</li> <li>4. When standing, do not pull up on the walker.</li> </ol>

Adapted from *Choosing the Right Cane or Walker* by Healthinaging.org <sup>22</sup>

Click on a mobility aid to learn more!



Do you need to talk to someone about a new or existing mobility aid?

**You can book an appointment with a physiotherapist or occupational therapist by contacting Compass Community Health at (905) 523-1184**

## 10. Falling: Staying Down & Getting Up

There may come a day when you have fallen in your home alone. Do not panic.

Take some deep breaths and assess your situation. Ask yourself...

Can you get up safely?

**I can get up safely**

Roll onto your side and push up onto your hands and knees.

Use stable furniture to help yourself sit up.

Stand up slowly and safely.

Make sure you rest. Tell someone you have fallen and see your doctor.

**I can't get up safely**

It is important to get somebody's attention.

- Make a loud noise
- Try and reach for the phone
- Slide or crawl to the front door
- Press your personal alarm

Use pillows or blankets within reach to stay warm and dry.

Conserve your energy and lie quietly until someone who can help you arrives.

Adapted from *Stay on Your Feet Western Australia* <sup>23</sup>

# HOW CAN I GET UP OFF THE FLOOR?

## Using my knees

**1** Turn onto your back



**2** Roll onto your side



**3** Push onto your hands



**4** Push up onto your hands and knees



**5** Kneel, using stable furniture to steady yourself



**6** Place your strongest leg forward



**7** Stand up



**8** Turn slowly



**9** Sit down. Rest and tell someone you have fallen



# HOW CAN I GET UP OFF THE FLOOR?

## Using my arms

**1** Turn onto your back



**2** Roll onto your side



**3** Push onto your hands



**4** Prop yourself up with both arms behind you



**5** Use a cushion (or other low sturdy object) as a low seat



**6** Lift bottom back onto cushion



**7** Push as far back as possible



**8** Lift bottom back onto chair



**9** Sit down. Rest and tell someone you have fallen



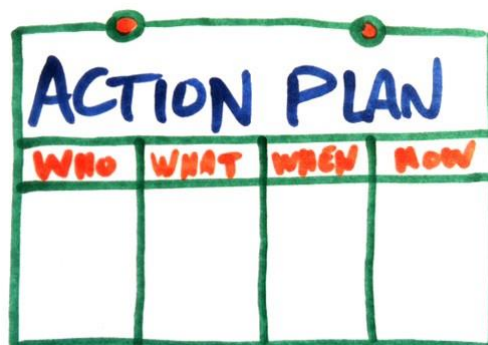


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## 11. Action Plan

Throughout the Finding Your Balance, we have discussed many strategies and areas that can be addressed to improve your balance and reduce your risk of having a fall. We have talked about the following areas:

- ✓ Safe medication management
- ✓ Managing chronic conditions
- ✓ Using exercise to improve balance, maintain/improve strength, and prevent falls
- ✓ Having your vision and hearing checked
- ✓ Managing poor sleep
- ✓ Managing dizziness
- ✓ Wearing proper footwear
- ✓ How to manage neuropathy (numbness in the feet)
- ✓ Home safety and reducing environmental/tripping hazards throughout your home
- ✓ Making use of equipment and assistive devices to help with daily activities
- ✓ Considering use of a mobility device such as a walker or cane if needed
- ✓ Safe use of public transportation
- ✓ Strategies for reducing stress/avoiding hurrying
- ✓ Strategies to help with pain throughout daily activities
- ✓ Eating healthy meals and on a regular schedule



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