

# FALLS PREVENTION

Falling is a very serious health problem for seniors. Falling should not be considered an inevitable consequence of aging. The consequences are serious and there are simple solutions you can apply to prevent them.

## ***Did you know?***

- Falls are the leading cause of injury and hospitalization among seniors across Canada
- 1/2 of these falls were at home
- 1/3 of these falls resulted in hip fracture
- 1/5 of falls lead to death in seniors

## ***Why do seniors fall? What can you do?***

Usually, falls have more than one cause. For example, someone who falls on a slippery floor may have weak leg muscles and/or be experiencing dizziness as a side effect of medication. This handout reviews some of the most common causes of falls and solutions to prevent them.

## **Inactivity**

Inactivity can lead to gait and balance disorders and loss of mobility. Regular physical activity and exercise will increase muscle strength, improve coordination and help to prevent falls.

## ***Solutions:***

- ◆ Talk to your doctor before you start an exercise program.
- ◆ Stay active to prevent falls. Find out about exercise/activity programs for seniors in your area (e.g. Gardening, Tai Chi, Walking group, etc.).
- ◆ Exercises can improve balance, mobility and strength. A health care professional can help you choose the appropriate exercise program for your specific needs.

## **Walking**

Walking constitutes a large portion of our days. Walking is a great way to exercise, especially for seniors. Walking aids such as canes or walkers can promote confidence, mobility and independence.

### *Solutions:*

- ◆ Ask a health professional if a walking aid would help you be safer.
- ◆ Ask your health professional how to properly adjust your walking aid. Proper adjustment is crucial to be safe with it.
- ◆ Ask your health professional how to safely use the walking aid. Misuse of a cane or a walker, for example, can increase fall risk instead of preventing an injury.

## **Medication**

Seniors are more at risk of falls if they take 4 or more medications. A medication that helps you to sleep or calms your nerves (sedatives) also increases the risk of falls. Some medications may cause dizziness or lightheaded symptoms.

### *Solutions:*

- ◆ Take medication correctly as indicated.
- ◆ Review your medication with your doctor every 6 months.
- ◆ Talk to your doctor about any side-effects that you experience.
- ◆ Return all expired medication to your pharmacist.
- ◆ Shop at only one pharmacy for your medication.
- ◆ If you take medication to calm nerves or to help you sleep, talk to your doctor about alternatives such as soft music, reading or relaxation exercises.
- ◆ Keep a list of all your medications.

## **Activities of daily living**

Being safe and careful during our everyday tasks is crucial to avoid falling. Falls often occur while multi-tasking or thinking about something else. Falls can be greatly reduced if we are safe in our everyday activities.

### *Solutions*

- ◆ Better safe than sorry! Many falls result from risky behaviors such as climbing, reaching, standing on unsteady chairs or bending. Asking for help can prevent a serious injury following a fall.
- ◆ Never be in a hurry while performing tasks, especially when carrying objects.
- ◆ Do one thing at a time, be alert and attentive.

- ◆ Try using a cart to carry objects.
- ◆ Stand up slowly after you are lying down.

## **Changes in vision**

As you age, vision often changes, making seeing obstacles and changes in surfaces harder to see. This increases the risk of tripping and falling.

### *Solutions:*

- ◆ Visit an optometrist regularly, and if a sudden change occurs, make an appointment sooner.
- ◆ Ensure you have adequate lighting in and around your home.

## **Nutritional factors**

An inadequate or poorly balanced diet can lead to an increased risk of falls.

### *Solutions:*

- ◆ If your medication allows it, eat calcium rich foods such as milk products, almonds, baked beans, salmon (with bones), dark green veggies, rhubarb.
- ◆ Ask your doctor about Vitamin D and Calcium supplements.
- ◆ Ensure adequate protein intake and hydration.

## **Fear of falling**

Fear can lead to a decline in the quality of life and can increase the risk of falls through inactivity, decline in strength, balance and self-confidence. Previous falls can also increase your risk.

### *Solutions:*

- ◆ Studies have shown that low-resistance exercises and weight-shifting activities are effective to reduce fear of falling.
- ◆ Education (sessions and documents) on identifying and reducing risk factors for falls are also effective to reduce fear of falling.

## **Home environment**

Most falls that occur in older people involve hazards and personal habits in and around the house. Simple solutions are possible and devices such as proper footwear, grab bars and hand rails can really help prevent falls.

### *Solutions:*

- ◆ Complete the “Falls Prevention checklist” (last page) to know how to make your home safer!

# Check List for Falls Prevention in Your Home

## Throughout your home

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Floors are not slippery. Spills are wiped up promptly.        | <input type="checkbox"/> Scatter mats are removed or securely taped to the floor.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rugs have no ripples or tears.                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Items used every day are stored within easy reach.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> All furniture is sturdy.                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Stepladders or step stools are never used.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Low tables are removed from the middle of the living room.    | <input type="checkbox"/> Entrance to every room has a light switch.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chairs have armrests and are the correct, comfortable height. | <input type="checkbox"/> Exterior stairs are kept free of ice and snow. Sprinkle grit or non-clumping cat litter.                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pathways are clear of extension cords and other objects.      | <input type="checkbox"/> All light fixtures have a minimum of 60 watt bulbs. Good lighting is installed in and around the house. |

## Entrance

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doors open easily.                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Mail is within easy reach.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exterior and interior lighting is good. | <input type="checkbox"/> Outside pathways are free of lawn furniture, hoses and other objects. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> There is a sturdy seat with armrests.   |  |

## Stairs (inside and outside)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stair edges are marked with contrasting colour.                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Handrail height feels comfortable when used for support. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> All steps are same height and the same depth.                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Handrails extend 12 inches beyond top and bottom steps.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stairs are well lit with a light switch at the bottom and top of stairs. | <input type="checkbox"/> Hand wraps around two thirds of handrail.                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stairs have non-slip surface and are in good repair.                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Stairs are free of clutter or any objects at all times.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handrails are present on both sides of stairs.                           |   |

## Bathroom

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bathtub plug is easy to reach; and to use.                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> If you have problems getting into or out of the bathtub:       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Full-length rubber bathtub mat is used for every bath or shower.               | <input type="checkbox"/> Use a bath seat.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> There are at least two grab bars in the tub area.                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Use a hand held shower.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Portable grab bars (on the side of the tub) do not move when used for support. | <input type="checkbox"/> Ask for help with bathing.                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rug outside the bathtub has a rubber backing.                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> If you have problems sitting on or getting up from the toilet: |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Use a raised toilet seat.                                      |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Use a grab bar conveniently located.                           |

## Bedroom

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A telephone is easily reached from the bed. | <input type="checkbox"/> A lamp and flash light are easily reached from the bed. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The bed is the correct height.              |  |

## Personal Habits

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I move slowly after lying or sitting to prevent dizziness; and sit on the side of the bed a few minutes before I stand. | <input type="checkbox"/> I turn on a night light before I go to bed.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I do not hurry.   | <input type="checkbox"/> I turn on a light when I get up at night.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I always wear well-fitted shoes or slippers with closed and low heels and non-slip soles.                               | <input type="checkbox"/> I avoid using a ladder or step-stool and ask for someone to help to reach high objects.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I do not use bath oil and I use liquid soap to avoid bending for soap bar.  | <input type="checkbox"/> Living alone, I use a personal Emergency Response Calling Service or I buddy with a neighbour, family or friend for a daily phone call. |