



TAKE *Action*

Prevent a fall
before it happens



Who THIS BOOK IS FOR...

...adults of all ages. Slips, trips and falls happen to anyone.

Many people think, “it won’t happen to me.” They believe falls are not important to them. Some think a fall is a sign of getting older, and there is nothing they can do to stop it. Others think it is good information for someone else.

Everyone can take steps to prevent a fall. This book will give you suggestions on how to take action and stay independent.

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WHAT IS A fall?

A fall is when you slip, trip, or fall suddenly onto the ground or floor. You could even bump against a wall or land on the stairs. The fall may or may not cause an injury.

- **Falls can happen anywhere.** You can fall in your home, in the community or in a hospital.
- **People fall for many reasons.** These are called risk factors. They include health conditions and choices we make, like shoes we wear. Know your risk factors so you can take action to reduce your chance of falling.

The good news:

- **Most falls can be prevented.**
- **You can take action to stay mobile and independent.**

MYTHS:

- Falls just happen and I cannot do anything to stop them.
- Falls will happen more often as I get older.

FACTS:

- Falls are not a normal part of aging.
- Falls are the leading cause of serious injuries in older adults.
- Adults over 65 have 9 times more fall injuries than those under 65.
- Falls can change your life and take away independence.
- 40% of nursing home admissions are because of complications from a fall.
- Falls can happen to anyone, but you can take action to help prevent a fall.

Is there a chance you might fall?

If you answer YES to 1 or more questions, you have a chance of falling. Turn to the pages shown beside the questions for helpful tips on how to take action, stay healthy and prevent a fall.

Have you had a slip, trip or fall in the past year?	... all pages
Do you have diabetes, heart or kidney disease?	... all pages
Do you tend to do many things at once?	... page 4
Do you tire easily?	... pages 5–7
Do you have trouble walking?	... pages 5–7
Do you feel unsteady?	... pages 5 and 8
Do you do less than 30 minutes of physical activity a day?	... pages 6–7
Do you ever feel dizzy or lightheaded?	... page 8
Do you take sleeping pills, tranquilizers or anti-depressants?	... page 9
Has it been more than 1 year since your doctor or pharmacist reviewed your medications?	... page 9
Is it hard to get up from a chair or toilet?	... page 10
Has it been more than 1 year since you had your eyes checked?	... page 11
Do you rush to the bathroom?	... page 12
Is it hard to eat a well-balanced diet?	... page 13
Do you have trouble with your feet?	... page 14–15
Do your shoes fit properly?	... page 15
Are you afraid of falling?	... page 16

Paying Attention to Avoid Risks

In a fast-paced world, it is common to do many things at once. Sometimes we are deep in thought or in a hurry. When our attention is divided, we are less likely to notice what is going on around us.

Take *Action*

- **Look up while walking** and scan the area a few feet ahead of you. Avoid looking only at your feet.
- **Look for hazards.** Watch out for cracks in the sidewalk, other people, newspaper boxes, pets and ice.
- **Pay close attention** when you are in places you've not been before.
- **Plan the time when you do things:**
 - If you have trouble seeing in the dark, take your garbage out in the daytime.
 - Plan outdoor travel to avoid bad weather.
- **Think about what you wear.** Make sure your clothes do not drag on the ground. Wear supportive shoes. (See page 15.)
- **Let the phone ring.** Avoid rushing to answer it. It is easy to overlook hazards when rushing. The caller can leave a message or call you back. Consider having a cordless phone or cell phone near you to avoid rushing.
- **Let people wait** if you are not ready to leave when they arrive. Your friends and family do not want to see you fall because you rushed.
- **Be attentive** to the things you do a lot because sometimes we forget about where the hazards are.

1 out of 3 seniors said they were deep in thought or caught up in a strong feeling when they fell. Their attention was divided. They could not react quickly enough to stop the fall.

Keep Walking and Keep Your Balance

To be independent you need to get out of bed, move around the house, go to and from a car, and get out to see your friends and family. Age can change how you walk, and lack of physical activity can, too.

These changes may include:

- Getting tired more easily
- Feeling unsteady when standing
- Losing strength in your leg muscles
- Losing feeling or having pain in your feet or legs

Signs of possible problems with your balance are:

- You get dizzy when you get up quickly
- The room spins when you turn your head fast
- You are unsteady and hold onto walls or furniture when walking

We rely a lot on our vision to help our balance. So our balance will change if we need new glasses or our vision is poor.

Walking with your hand in your pockets and carrying a heavy purse can change your balance. So can unsupportive footwear.

Take *Action*

- **Be physically active every day.** (See pages 6–7.)
- **Rest when you feel tired.**
- **Sit to get dressed if you feel unsteady.**
- **Use a walking aid if you have balance problems.** Talk to your healthcare provider about aids that are right for you and before starting a new physical activity.
- **Rearrange kitchen cupboards** so most items you use are between your hip and eye level.

Stay Active

Physical activity improves health at any age.
Everyone needs it.

What's in it for me?

- It keeps your bones and muscles healthy and strong
- It improves your balance
- It helps you move easily
- It keeps your heart and lungs healthy
- It increases your energy
- It helps you sleep
- It improves your confidence when walking

This will help you get up and down stairs, in and out of a chair or bathtub, and in and out of bed.

Take *Action*

- **At any age, your body can get stronger with activity.**
It is never too late to start.
- **Do at least 150 minutes of activity every week** if you are over 18 years old. These activities should make you sweat a little and breathe a little harder. You can break this into 10-minute periods. If you are just getting active, start slowly, and add a few minutes each day.
- **Being active will help you with your daily living tasks** like getting up from a chair or into a car. Activities should strengthen both your arm and leg muscles. Arm strength is needed just as much as leg strength for daily tasks.
- **If it is hard to get started**, find a buddy, make a plan or try something new to keep it interesting. You could even join a class. Find programs at your local YMCA, senior's centre, or municipal recreation department.
- **Always talk to your healthcare provider** before starting a new physical activity.

- **Examples of physical activity include:**
 - Strength and balance activities
Tai chi, stair climbing, exercising with weights or exercise bands, and doing wall pushups
 - Endurance (heart) activities
Walking, dancing, gardening and swimming
 - Flexibility activities
Tai chi, and stretching
- **Activities that emphasize balance are essential** so include those everyday. Balance means not standing still but being able to “catch yourself” if you lose your balance. Keeping your trunk muscles strong will help.
- **Listen to your body.** Stop if you have pain or discomfort. If you are not sure whether you are having pain or muscle stiffness, talk to your healthcare provider.

You can also consult a physical therapist or recreation therapist for more information. (see resources on page 20)

“ I walk daily and belong to a bowling league. Regular activity keeps me strong. When I tripped, I regained my balance and didn’t fall. My friend, who isn’t very active, wasn’t so fortunate when she had a fall and broke her hip.

”

WARNING:

The greatest health risk for older adults is living an inactive life.

World Health Organization, 2005

Manage Your Blood Pressure

Lightheadedness or dizziness can be caused by problems with your blood pressure. Have your blood pressure checked regularly.

Take *Action*

- **Sometimes a drop in your blood pressure can happen when you get up from a lying or sitting position.** This is called postural hypotension. Be careful and change your position slowly. If you have been lying down, sit for a few minutes. Stand up slowly and give your body time to adjust. Then slowly begin moving.
- **Dizziness can be caused from other health problems.** It can happen when you look up or when you turn your head quickly. Tell your healthcare provider if you feel lightheaded or dizzy.
- **Take care when you bend down, like when gardening.** Raise your head up slowly. Make sure you have your balance before you start moving.
- **Eat 3 meals a day or eat small amounts often throughout the day.** Include plenty of fruits and vegetables in your diet. Missing meals and having too much salt in your food can make you dizzy.
- **Drink 6 to 8 glasses (8 oz or 250 ml) of water and other fluids each day** or as recommended by your healthcare provider. Not enough water can lead to dizziness. If you have heart failure, other serious health conditions, or take water pills, talk to your healthcare provider about how much you should drink.

“ I was getting out of bed to go to the bathroom when I suddenly felt dizzy. The room started to move and the next thing I knew, I was lying on the floor. After my doctor changed my medication, I haven't been dizzy.

”

Manage Your Medications

- Medications include prescriptions, over-the-counter pills, vitamins and herbal supplements.
- Medications that help you relax, sleep or improve your mood can increase your risk of falling.
- Some medications may cause a drop in blood pressure which can increase your risk of falling. (See page 8.)
- Watch out for cold and flu medications you buy over-the-counter as some can make you drowsy.

Take *Action*

- **Ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse practitioner to check all your medications at least once a year.** They can help make sure you are taking only what you need.
- **If your medications make you drowsy or dizzy,** tell your doctor, pharmacist or nurse practitioner. They can sometimes prescribe a different medication that does not have those side effects.
- **Talk about possible interactions** of alcohol and medications. Alcohol and medications increase your risk of falling.
- **Never take anyone else's medications.**
- **If you have questions about how to take your medications,** talk to your healthcare provider. Be sure to ask about the effect of a new medication on food or other medications.
- **If you take medications for diabetes,** talk to your doctor about how to manage your blood sugar overnight.

Sleeping Troubles?

Ask your healthcare provider about how to deal with sleep problems without using sleeping pills. Try things like being more active during the day, avoiding coffee and tea after supper, or listening to quiet music at bedtime.

Be “Falls Smart” in Your Home

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Adapting your home will allow you to stay independent and decrease the chance of a fall.

Take *Action*

- **Use safety grab bars in your tub and shower.** Do not hold the handle on the soap dish or a towel rack as they can break.
- **Use a non-slip mat inside and outside your tub or shower.** Replace them if they do not stick.
- **Keep a cordless phone or cell phone** close to you especially when showering or bathing.
- **Keep your toilet paper roll within easy reach.**
- **Have handrails on both sides of your stairways and check that they are secure.** Always turn on the lights. When carrying things, keep one hand free to hold onto the handrail.
- **Clear pathways of furniture, cords and clutter and keep them well lit.**
- **If it is hard to get out of your chair, put an extra cushion on it or use a chair with armrests.** Strengthening your leg muscles can also make it easier to get up. (See pages 6–7.)
- **Remove scatter mats and area rugs** or tape down the edges. It is easy to catch your toes on the edge and trip.
- **Look out for things** that can cause you to trip, such as pets, hoses and rakes, door thresholds and buckled carpet.

There are some items that you can purchase or borrow to help you do things by yourself. These include a seat for your bathtub or shower, a bar beside your bed and an emergency medical alert system. An occupational therapist can help you access these and other items. (see resources on page 20)

“ I was having a friend come to tea and wanted to use some dishes I kept on a high shelf. When I reached up, I lost my balance and fell. Now my daughter is moving any items I use a lot so I can reach them easily.

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Make the Most of Your Vision

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Your eyes not only see where you are going, but help with balance and movement. As you age, your eyes change.

- Your eyes are more sensitive to glare and need more time to adjust to sudden light changes.
- Your eyes lose depth perception. It becomes harder to judge distance and depth. This can affect how you see stairs and curbs.
- You need more light to see at night. A 60-year-old needs 10 times more light to see at night than a teenager.

Take *Action*

- **Have your eyes checked each year.** Alberta residents can have their eyes checked free every year after they are 65 years.
- **If you have multifocal lenses, tilt your head down** to look out of the top half of your glasses when using stairs.
- **Remove your reading glasses when walking.**
- **Pause and give your eyes time to adjust** to changes in light.
- **Have a lamp by your bed** with a switch that is easy to reach.
- **Use the maximum wattage recommended in each light fixture.**
- **Watch for glare.** Eliminate exposed or bare bulbs. Use blinds or light curtains on your windows. Wear sunglasses outside both in winter and summer.
- **Keep pathways well lit inside and outside.** Use night lights and motion detector lights.
- **Use non-skid or reflective strips at the edge of each step.** Use a different colour than the stairs to make it easier to see the edges. Use them on door thresholds too. Remove patterned carpet on stairs.

“ I hadn't realized it was 3 years since I saw the eye doctor. I can see better now. I just have to be careful on the stairs as I get used to my new bifocals. ”

The Busy Bladder

Do you:

- dash to the bathroom?
- get up at night to go the bathroom?
- go often to the bathroom during the day or night?

These can increase your chance of falling if you try to get to the bathroom quickly.

Take *Action*

- **It is important to drink enough water and other fluids each day.** Drink 6 to 8 glasses (8 oz or 250 ml) or as recommended by your healthcare provider. If you have heart failure, take water pills, or have other serious health problems, talk to your healthcare provider.
- **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 act like a water pill, and increase how often you need to urinate.
- **Talk to your healthcare provider if you have problems with your “water works.”** Examples are burning when you urinate or going to the bathroom more often than usual. There are several things that can help. Your healthcare provider can give you suggestions or decide if medications are needed. You could also ask about going to a continence clinic.
- **Wear clothing that is easy to take on and off.** For example, an elastic waistband is easier to manage than a belt.
- **Try to go regularly to the bathroom during the day,** about every 2 to 3 hours.

Eat Well for Life

Healthy eating can make you look, feel and perform better. Choosing the right amount and type of food will give you the energy you need to be healthy and strong. It also cuts your risk for many illnesses like diabetes and osteoporosis. Osteoporosis is when you have weak bones that break easily. You are more likely to have osteoporosis as you get older.

Take *Action*

- **Eat regular meals and snacks during the day.** Missing meals can affect balance and strength. Check Canada's Food Guide to make sure you eat the right number of servings of each food group.
- **Drink 6 to 8 glasses (8 oz or 250 ml) of water and other fluids** each day or as recommended by your healthcare provider.
- **Make sure to get enough calcium and vitamin D.**

About calcium:

Adults from 19 to 50 years need 1000 mg of calcium every day. Adults over 50 need 1200 mg of calcium every day. Getting enough calcium can prevent broken bones. Sources of calcium include dairy products like milk, and some non-dairy foods, like juice with added calcium.

About vitamin D:

Adults from 19 to 50 years need 400 to 1000 IU of vitamin D everyday. Adults over 50 need 1000 to 2000 IU of vitamin D every day. Getting enough vitamin D will help your body absorb calcium and keep your muscles strong.

- **Good sources of Vitamin D** are milk, sardines, salmon and other oil fish. Sunlight on your skin also makes vitamin D. In our northern climate your body cannot make enough vitamin D from October to March. You need to rely on supplements to get enough vitamin D during those months.
- **If you avoid sunshine**, are unable to go outdoors, or cover up for religious or cultural reasons, speak to your healthcare provider about supplements.
- **If you have diabetes**, manage your blood sugar. Low blood sugar can increase your chance of falling.

Be Kind to Your Feet

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Taking care of your feet and shoes are important to prevent falls. If your feet are sore, nail care is poor, or if you have foot problems, the way you walk can change. Shoes support your feet and help you keep your balance.

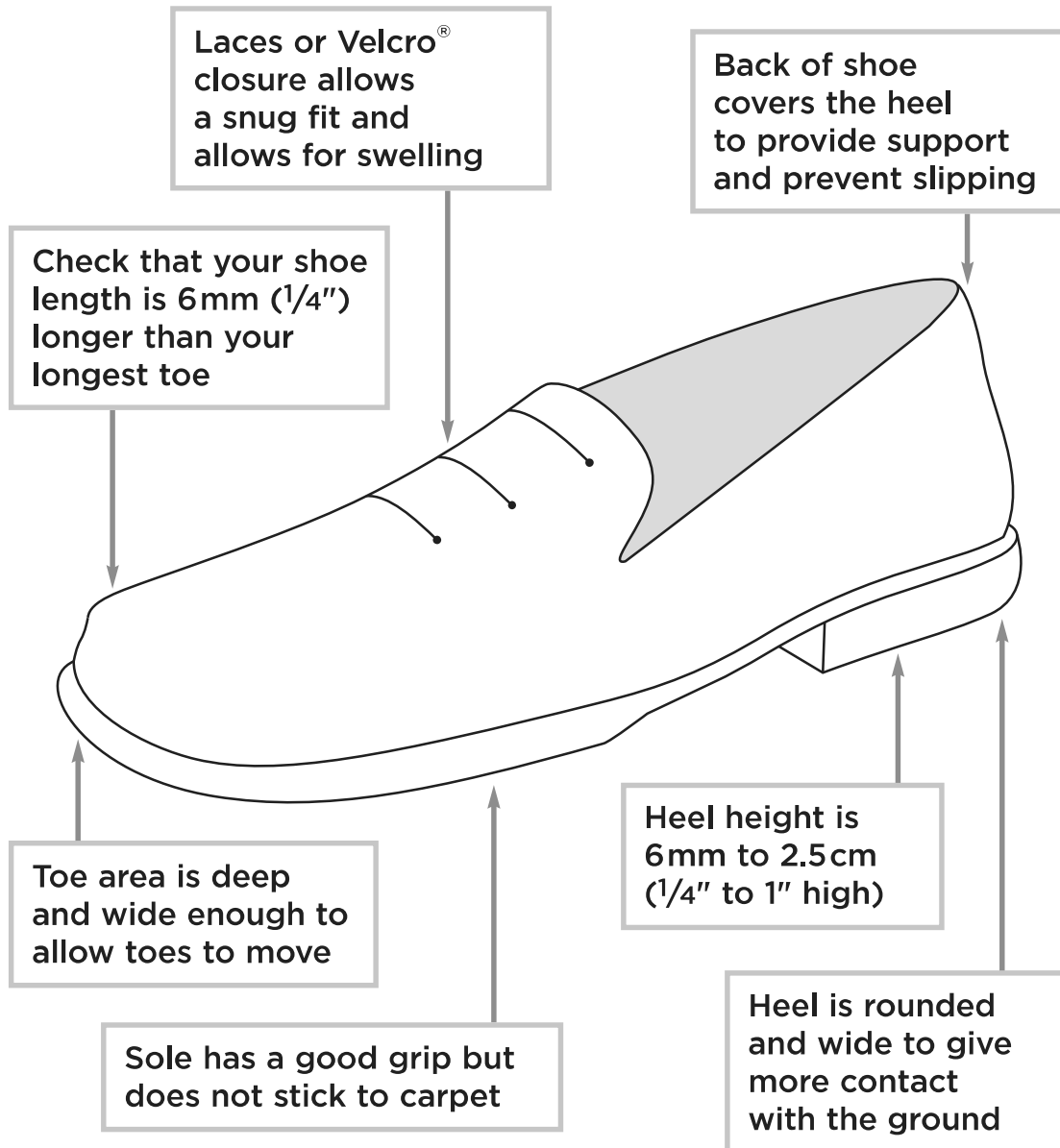
Take *Action*

- **Check your feet often** for corns, calluses, bunions, open sores, dry skin and thickened nails. Use a mirror if needed. This is very important if you have diabetes. If you need help, ask your healthcare provider to check your feet for you.
- **Have foot pain checked by a healthcare provider.** You can ask a podiatrist or a nurse from the Victorian Order of Nurses (VON). You can also go to a foot clinic. They can also give you foot and nail care. Ask about foot exercises for foot pain or ankle stiffness.
- **If you like to soak your feet, do not soak for more than 10 minutes.** Soaking too long will dry your feet out. (Soaking is not recommended if you have diabetes.)
- **Dry your feet completely after washing.** Apply cream or lotions to moisturize. Use cotton socks if your feet sweat a lot.
- **Wear well fitting shoes** that provide support and allow enough room if your feet swell. Avoid bare feet, stocking feet and heavy shoes.
- **Avoid floppy slippers with an open heel.** Wear a pair of shoes that you only use inside.

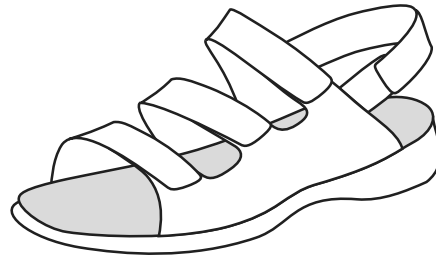
“ I was rushing to answer the phone and tripped on the rug and fell. My old floppy slippers probably didn't help. I feel safer now wearing my new running shoes inside the house.

”

What to look for in a supportive shoe:



Running shoes are supportive. Choose a pair with a thin sole so you can feel the surfaces you walk on.



The best type of sandal has a back strap, covers your foot and is adjustable.

Afraid You Might Fall?

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Paying attention is important, but being too afraid of falling can be a problem.

Fear of falling can lower your quality of life and stop you from:

- doing the activities you enjoy
- getting out and seeing your friends
- being active. If you do less, your legs will become weaker and your reaction time will get slower. You will then be at greater risk of falling.

Take *Action*

- **Be aware of your own attitudes and concerns about falling.** For example, do you think you could ever slip, trip or fall?
- **Be a positive thinker.** Know you can do things to prevent a fall.
- **Be a problem-solver.** Find ways to do things without taking a lot of risks.
- **Have a plan for getting help if you need it.** Consider using an emergency medical alert device, especially if you live alone.
- **Talk to your healthcare provider to see how you can stay active.** Let them know if you find it hard to get outside and do your usual things. (See pages 6–7.)
- **Find out how to gain confidence doing your daily activities.** (See page 10.)
- **Remove hazards from your home.** (See page 10.)
- **Identify your risk factors and know your limits.** Reduce your risks as much as possible. Change the way you do things or use equipment to make tasks easier.
- **Practice getting up from the floor** when someone is around who can help you.
- **Keep in touch with friends and family.** See them often.

My Action Plan

Write down the things you want to do to prevent a slip, trip or fall. Use the chart below to make your own plan of action. Examples are given to get you started.

What are the things that might make me fall?	What do I want to change?	Who can help?	Have I done it yet?
Poor strength in my legs	Take a Tai Chi class	Call my community league or rec centre	
I take a lot of pills	The number of pills I take	Talk to my doctor to have them all reviewed.	

How to Get Up From the Floor by Yourself

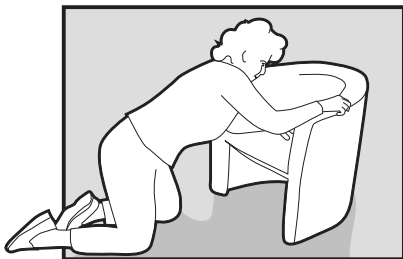
- Keep calm.
- Check your body.
- If you are injured, call for help. Stay warm.
- If you are not hurt, look for a sturdy piece of furniture, like a chair.



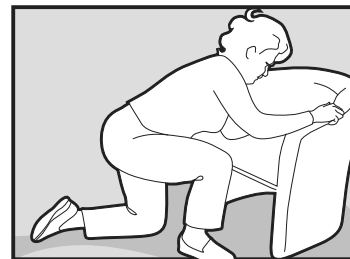
1) Roll onto your side.



2) Crawl over to a chair or sturdy furniture.



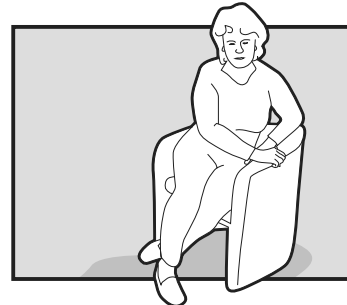
3) From a kneeling position, put your arms up onto the seat of the chair.



4) Bring one knee forward and put that foot on the floor.



5) Push up with your arms and legs, pivot your bottom around.

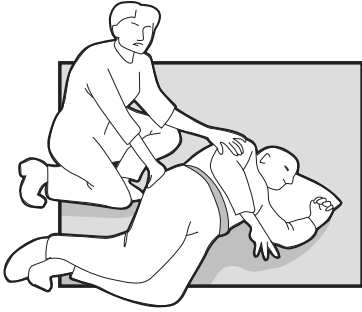


6) Sit down. Rest before trying to move.

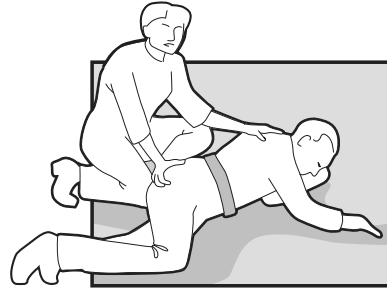
Let your healthcare provider know after you have a fall.

How to Safely Help Someone to Get Up

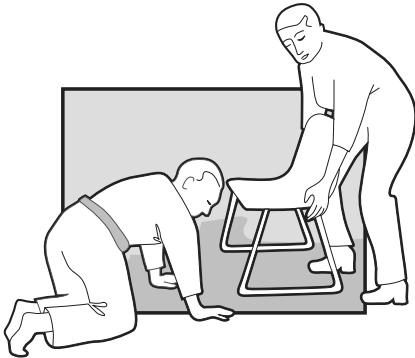
- Do not hurry. Do not try to get the person up right away.
- Calm the person and yourself.
- Check for injuries. If they are badly injured, call 911. While waiting for help, keep them warm and comfortable.
- If the person thinks they can get up, get two sturdy chairs. Place one near their head and one near their feet.



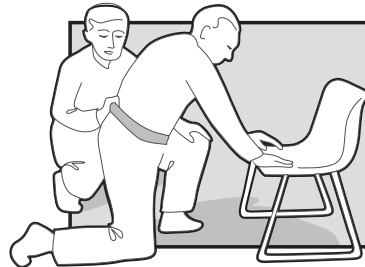
- 1) It is important that the fallen person does the work.



- 2) The helper should only guide lightly, helping the person to roll on their side.



- 3) Help the person to kneel. Place one chair in front of the person.



- 4) Ask the person to lean on the seat of the chair and bring one leg forward. Put that foot on the floor.



- 5) Place a second chair behind the person. Ask them to push up with their arms and legs, then sit back in the chair behind. Guide them into the seat. Do not lift them.

Always call the person's healthcare provider to let them know about the fall.

If the person who has fallen is a resident in care, ask staff for help.

Resources

- To find an OT:** Alberta College of Occupational Therapists
780-436-8381 1800-561-5429
www.acot.ca (Accessed January 31, 2013)
- To find a PT:** Physiotherapy Alberta (College and Association)
780-438-0338 1800-291-2782
www.physiotherapyalberta.ca
(Accessed January 31, 2013)
- To find a Rec Therapist:** Alberta Therapeutic Recreation Association
1403-258-2520 1800-258-2520
www.alberta-tr.org/ (Accessed January 31, 2013)

Alberta Aids to Daily Living (AADL). An Alberta program providing financial assistance to buy medical equipment and supplies. An assessment by certain healthcare providers determines the equipment and supplies that an Albertan can receive through this program.

Edmonton phone: **780-427-0731**

Toll-free in Alberta: **310-000, then 780-427-0731**

<http://www.seniors.alberta.ca/aadl/>

(Accessed January 30, 2013)

Websites

www.findingbalancealberta.ca

Information with Alberta information on preventing falls.
(Accessed January 30, 2013.)

www.informalberta.ca (Accessed January 31, 2013.)

www.canadiancontinence.ca/

Information on busy bladders. (Accessed January 31, 2013.)

www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/toolkit/CheckListForSafety.htm

Checklist to look at home hazards and what to do about them, provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (Accessed January 31, 2013.)

www.osteoporosis.ca (Accessed January 31, 2013.)

www.silvertimes.ca/home/active-living (Accessed January 31, 2013.)

www.centre4activeliving.ca (Accessed January 31, 2013.)

www.centre4activeliving.ca/older-adults/rural/index.html

(Accessed January 31, 2013.)

These two websites give information on active living

References

A Million Messages for Falls Prevention. Created by Alberta Health Services (Edmonton), City of Edmonton, Greater Edmonton Foundation, and the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research, 2008.

Alberta Caregiver College® - Support for Caregiving of Older Adults – Falls: www.caregivercollege.org/scoa/?Falls.html
(Accessed February 16, 2011.)

Better Health Channel: Physical Activity
State Government of Victoria, Australia, 2012. www.vic.gov.au
(Accessed March 11, 2013)

Canadian Falls Prevention Curriculum. Scott, V., Lockhart, S., Gallagher, E., Smith, D., Asselin, G., Belton, K., Duncan, B., Vancouver, B.C. B.C. Injury Research & Prevention Unit, 2007.

Don't Fall For It. Falls Can Be Prevented! A guide to preventing falls for older people. State Government of South Australia, 2004.

Stay On Your Feet.
Department of Health, Western Australia, 2008.

Steady As You Go #2 Client Handbook: A guide for seniors to reduce their risks for falling. Alberta Health Services, Edmonton area, 2001.

The Safe Living Guide: A guide to home safety for seniors. Health Canada, 1997.



To learn more about programs and
services for preventing falls, call:

Health Link Alberta (Calgary):	403-943-LINK (5465)
Health Link Alberta (Edmonton):	780-408-LINK (5465)
Toll-free	1-866-408-LINK (5465)

<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/>
(Accessed January 31, 2013.)

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