

Preventing Falls in Seniors

More than one third of the Canadian senior population fall each year and it's estimated that 50 % of those who fall will suffer moderate to severe injuries such as sprains, hip fractures or head traumas that prematurely reduce their mobility and independence. More than 90 % of these incidents are predictable and preventable.

A physiotherapist can help evaluate the home environment to identify objects that increase the risk of falling—loose rugs, slipping on uneven surfaces, unsecured cords and wires etc.

The risk of falling in older adults can be reduced dramatically when specific exercises, activities and interventions are prescribed by a physiotherapist. A targeted physiotherapy treatment program can help maintain or regain strength, flexibility and endurance in a way that feels safe and secure.

Here are a few tips for reducing the risk of falling:

*use of aids for walking, balancing, hearing and seeing—these are sources of strength to help you do things not signs of weakness

*plant both feet securely on the ground before getting out of the car

*wear a good pair of lace up walking shoes

*sit rather than stand while dressing

*before getting out of a chair or getting 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

*put everyday items on the bottom shelf

*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

*try to be physically active every day to improve posture, muscle strength and balance. Enroll in Tai Chi or an exercise program to improve flexibility

*don't leave clutter on the stairs that can cause a fall

*always keep one hand free when carrying things up and down the stairs so that you can hold on to the handrail

*have your vision and hearing checked regularly.