

FALL PREVENTION TOOLKIT

FALLS ARE NOT A NORMAL PART OF AGING.

Talk to your health care provider if you have had a fall.

This Toolkit will help you take action to prevent falls and stay independent.

For more information on fall prevention, visit www.FindingBalanceNS.ca or ask your primary care provider for additional resources.

For information on government programs and services available to older adults in Nova Scotia call 2-1-1, or NS Health Continuing Care toll-free at 1-800-225-7225.

Finding Balance

NOVA SCOTIA

Trauma NB

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Understanding Your Risk

Anyone can fall, but the likelihood of falling increases as we age. Older adults fall more often because the conditions that contribute toward each person's risk of falling (also known as their fall risk factors), tend to increase with age. Falls among older adults can lead to negative health outcomes if they if they are not addressed the right way, with the right people.

Did You Know?

About one in every three adults aged 65 years or more living at home will fall at least once a year. Falls are the leading cause of injury and hospitalizations in older Canadian adults.

Assessing Your Risk of Falling

Older adults should assess their risk of falling. To assess your risk of falling:

1. Complete the checklist on the next page. Ask family and friends for their input.
2. Book an appointment with your primary care provider (family physician or nurse practitioner). Bring your completed checklist to your appointment.
3. If you do not have a primary health care provider, call 2-1-1 to ask for directions.

Fall Risk Factors

A fall risk factor is something that increases a person's chance of falling. Falls can happen because of even one risk factor. However, the more factors, the greater the risk of falling. In many cases, fall risk factors can be changed or eliminated

Some of the fall risk factors that may be changed include:

- Feeling dizzy, weak, or unsteady
- Poor nutrition
- Fear of falling
- Poor eyesight/vision
- Lack of sleep
- Home design, including tripping hazards

Check Your Risk for Falling

Circle "Yes" or "No" for each statement below			Why it matters
Yes (2)	**No (0)**	I have fallen in the past 6 months.	People who have fallen once are likely to fall again.
Yes (2)	**No (0)**	I use or have been advised to use a cane or walker to get around safely.	People who have been advised to use a cane or walker may already be more likely to fall.
Yes (1)	**No (0)**	Sometimes I feel unsteady when I am walking.	Unsteadiness or needing support while walking are signs of poor balance.
Yes (1)	**No (0)**	I steady myself by holding onto furniture when walking at home.	This is also a sign of poor balance.
Yes (1)	**No (0)**	I am worried about falling.	People who are worried about falling are more likely to fall.
Yes (1)	**No (0)**	I need to push with my hands to stand up from a chair.	Strengthening your leg muscles can reduce your risk of falling and being injured.
Yes (1)	**No (0)**	I have some trouble stepping up onto a curb.	This is also a sign of weak leg muscles.
Yes (1)	**No (0)**	I often have to rush to the toilet.	Rushing to the bathroom, especially at night, increases your chance of falling.
Yes (1)	**No (0)**	I have lost some feeling in my feet.	Numbness in your feet can cause stumbles and lead to falls.
Yes (1)	**No (0)**	I take medicine that sometimes makes me fee light headed or more tired than usual.	Side effects from medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.
Yes (1)	**No (0)**	I take medicine to help me sleep or improve my mood.	These medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.
Yes (1)	**No (0)**	I often feel sad or depressed.	Symptoms of depression, such as not feeling well or feeling slowed down, are linked to falls.
TOTAL _____		**Answer the statements above then add up the number of points for each "yes" answer. If you scored 4 points or more, you may be at risk for falling. Remember to bring this checklist to your primary healthcare provider to discuss your risk factors.**	

checklist was developed by the Greater Los Angeles VA Geriatric Research Education Clinical Center and affiliates and assessment tool (Rubenstein et al. J Safety Res; 1: 42(6)493-499). Adapted with permission of the authors.

Medication Safety

For older adults, the more medication taken, the higher the risk of fall. That's why all older adults should schedule yearly medication reviews. They are especially important for older adults taking multiple medications, over-the-counter products, natural products, or vitamins.

A medication review is when a qualified health care professional reviews each prescription, medication, product, or vitamin you're taking to ensure each is being used appropriately, and that its benefits outweigh the harm. You can schedule a medication review with your pharmacist, physician, or nurse practitioner.

For the Medication Review

- Put all the medications, vitamins, dietary supplements, ointments and creams you use in a bag. Give it to the person conducting the review.
- Tell them about any changes to your health and any medication side effects.
- To remember what is said, bring someone with you or take notes.
- Alcohol can affect how medications work. Ask how it might affect you.

Medication Tips

- Make sure you understand all medications before taking them. Know why you need the medication, the recommended dosage and schedule, and possible side effects.
- If your medication makes you feel sleepy or dizzy, talk to your health care provider or pharmacist as soon as possible. They may adjust something to help you stay well.
- Use the same pharmacy every time your fill any prescription.
- Keep a list of your current medications in your wallet and at home.
- Do not share your medications. Do not take another person's medications.
- Store all medications safely. Follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Check the expiry date before using any medication.
- Ask your pharmacist or primary care provider if you are having trouble:
    - Swallowing your medication
    - Opening your medication
    - Handling your medication
    - Reading medication labels
    - Remembering to take your medication
    - Following the recommended dosage or schedule

Staying Physically Active

Regular physical activity helps people of all ages and abilities stay healthy.

Other Benefits of Physical Activity

- Reduces the risk of falls by improving balance and increasing muscle strength.
- By preventing their risk of falls and related injuries, older adults can better maintain independent lifestyles.
- Increases energy, confidence, and ability to join family and friends in events.
- Can improve personal mood and mental health.
- Provides social benefits. Group exercise classes are a terrific way to meet new people.

Before Getting Active

- Your body needs energy. Eat well, with a balanced diet.
- Drink lots of water. Your body needs to be well hydrated when you are exercising.
- Wear appropriate clothes and shoes for your planned activity.
- If you are unsure if exercise is safe for you, talk with your health care provider or a certified exercise specialist. This is especially important for older adults who are at a higher risk for falls.

Helpful Tips

- Ease into it. Start with a gentle I0-minute session. Increase length and intensity over time.
- Try to find a wide range of physical activities for different seasons and settings.
- Make it a habit. Exercise a few hours each week, all year.
- Consider exercise programs that are focused on fall prevention. These programs help participants reduce their risk of falling by improving their balance and coordination. Some of these programs are available online. Others may be offered through your community.

Remember: every little bit helps.
Any amount of physical activity will help you live well.

Taking Care of Your Feet

- Check your feet often. Look for corns, blisters, open sores, redness, dry skin, swelling and ingrown toenails. Use a mirror, if needed.
- To prevent ingrown toenails, trim your toenails straight across. Not too short!
- Wash your feet in warm but not hot water. Dry feet completely, especially between your toes.
- To maintain good circulation, do regular exercises such as toe raises and ankle circles.

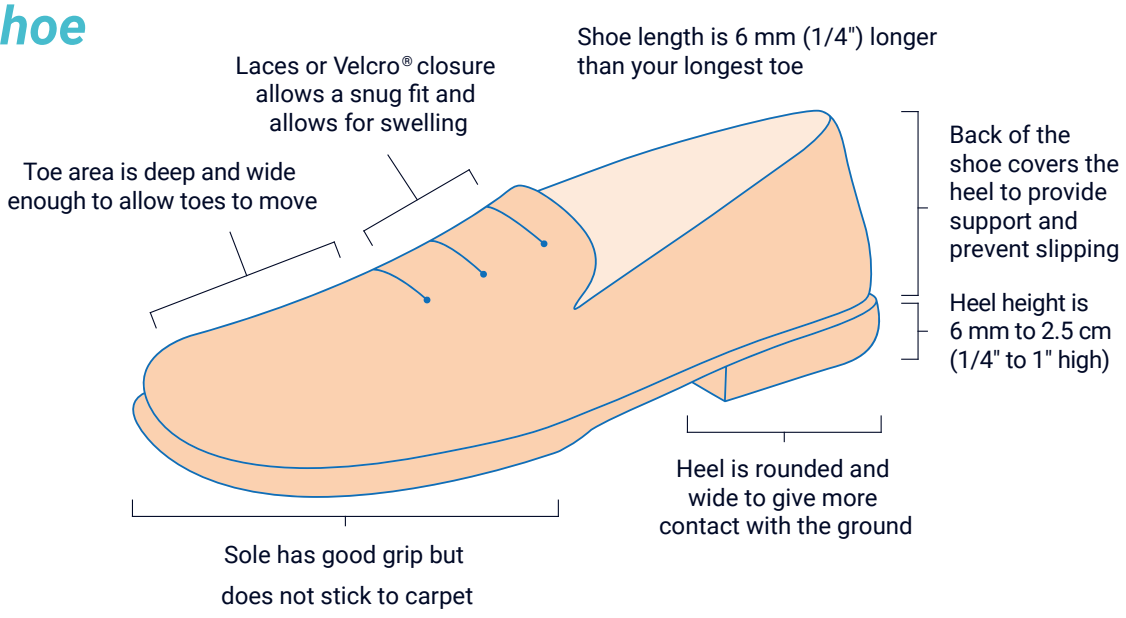
Talk to your primary care provider or podiatrist if you have

- Pain or swelling in your feet.
- Tingling or pins and needles in your feet.
- Any changes to the shape of your feet or toes.
- Footwear that doesn't fit properly, with poor support or with worn soles can increase your risk for a fall.

Footwear Tips

- Try to wear supportive footwear with a non-slip tread both inside and outside your home. A void walking in bare feet, socks, or floppy slippers with an open heel.
- If your feet swell, choose well-fitting shoes with laces or a Velcro closure. This will allow for more room if needed.
- When buying footwear, wear your usual socks or stockings and orthotics. Try both shoes on and walk around in them. The heels should not slip if they fit properly.

The Ideal Shoe



What to Do If Someone Falls

While everyone should take steps to prevent falls and related injuries, it is also important to know what to do if someone falls.

Before Trying to Get Up

- Catch your breath. Take your time. Remain calm.
- Complete a head-to-toe scan of your body. See any injuries? Feel any discomfort?
- If you are injured, feel discomfort, or are unable to get up:
    - Call out for help. Make any noise to attract attention.
    - Use an emergency call device or a telephone to ask for help.
    - Wait for assistance. Place yourself in a comfortable position.

How to Get Up from a Fall

In the event you are by yourself, and you ARE NOT injured, follow these steps to safely get up:



Take as much time as you need in between each step.

After a fall

- See a health care professional as quickly as possible.
- Take your time to monitor the situation. Some issues may only appear after a few hours or days.
- Consult your primary care provider to help develop a personal plan to prevent another fall.

FALL PREVENTION Personal Action Plan

You are encouraged to use this Action Plan to identify measures that you would take to help reduce your risk of falling. It is important to determine which tasks you can complete yourself, which ones require help from other people to complete, and which ones require professional assistance. If you are not sure, you are encouraged to consult a health care provider before getting started.

Work to be done / help needed		✔
Medication		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
Physical Activity		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
Footwear		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
Other Safety Concerns		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐

For more fall prevention information and **resources for older adults and caregivers**, visit the Finding Balance NS website at ***www.FindingBalanceNS.ca***

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