STAYING INDEPENDENT

Home Safety Checklist











Finding Balance

NOVA SCOTIA

Trauma NB

Using your Home Safety Checklist

Falls in older adults are often due to hazards that are easy to overlook but simple to fix. In order to reduce your risk of a fall, this checklist will help you identify some of the most common hazards in and around your home. It will also provide you with helpful suggestions for reducing and removing those hazards.

The Home Safety Checklist asks about hazards found in the different room of your home. As you go through each room and answer the questions, make note of any changes and/or repairs that need to be completed in your copy of the accompanying Personal Action Plan one-pager. If possible, consider having a family member or friend help you.

When you are finished, go through your notes and make a plan to eliminate the hazards you discovered. However, it is important to determine which tasks you can complete yourself, which ones require two or more people to complete, and which ones require professional assistance. If you are uncertain, you are encouraged to consult a licensed professional before getting started. Keep in mind that you may be creating a new hazard if you try to repair something in an unsafe manner.

Thank you for taking the time to make your home a safer place for yourself, your family and your friends!

Disclaimer: The information presented in this publication is intended as a guide to help reduce the risk of falls in older adults. This guide does not list every potential environmental hazard in the home. The recommendations provided in this document may not be appropriate in all circumstances. The user of this guide should take all reasonable steps to recognize tasks that may require two or more people to complete and/or professional expertise.

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Outside Your Home

	Yes	No	N/A
1. Are the paths around your home in good repair?			
Suggested action: Have your walkways repaired before the winter season to avoid hidden trip hazards. Make sure to address common hazards such as cracks, holes or uneven surfaces.			
2. Are walkways clear of clutter?			
Suggested action: Keep all yard tools in a proper storage area away from any walkways. Use a hose reel to store your garden hose. Trim shrubs and bushes so that they do not infringe on walkways. Keep paths free of leaves which may hide potential tripping hazards.			
3. Are walkways clear of ice and snow?			
Suggested action: Remove snow immediately after it falls. Keep a bag of rock salt (or other type of ice melter) at each door to sprinkle on icy patches when needed.			
4. Are the paths and entrances well-lit?			
Suggested action: Install extra lights outside your house to keep paths and entrances well lit. Sensor lights that turn on automatically are recommended.			
5. Are the stairs leading to your home in good repair?			
Suggested action: Fix any loose, cracked or uneven steps as soon as possible. Make sure all outside stairs and/or ramps have sturdy, easy-to-grip handrails on both sides of the entrance.			

Garage

	Yes	No	N/A
6. When your car is in the garage, can you get in and out of it easily?			
Suggested action: Walkways around the car should be free of any objects. Use storage racks to help organize your garage. Store your heavy objects on lower shelves.			
7. Is your garage free of debris and other hazards?			
Suggested action: Garage floors should be kept free of clutter. Watch for liquid leaks from your vehicle and clean any wet spots immediately.			
8. Is your garage well lit?			
Suggested action: Many garages only have one light in the middle of the room which is not enough to cover the whole area. Install extra lighting as needed to help keep the garage well lit.			

Stairs

	Yes	No	N/A
9. Are the stairs safe and in good repair?			
Suggested action: Remove loose or torn carpet from the stairs and scatter mats from the top of the staircase. Fix any loose or uneven steps as soon as possible.			
10. Do all stairs have a sturdy handrail?			
Suggested action: Make sure that the handrails go beyond the top and bottom step. Fix any loose handrails or put in new ones. Handrails should be installed on both sides of the stairs for maximum safety.			
11. Are you able to see the edges of the steps clearly?			
Suggested action: Stairs can be made safer by painting the front edge of the steps with a contrasting color, or putting an adhesive non-slip strip on the steps. It is also important to make sure that you do not leave any objects on the stairs since this is a common tripping hazard.			
12. Are all stairs well lit?			
Suggested action: Make sure that both the light switch at the top and bottom of each stairway function properly so you are never using the stairs in the dark. Install a night light in the stair area for extra lighting.			

Did you know?

If needed, it is important to know how to safely use stairs with a cane. To climb stairs, place your cane in the hand opposite your weaker leg. With your free hand, grasp the handrail. Step up on your good leg first, then step up on the weaker leg and proceed carefully.

To come down stairs, put your cane on the step first, then your weaker leg. and then, finally, your good leg, which carries your body weight.



Floors and Hallways

	Yes	No	N/A
13. Are all floors and hallways well lit?			
Suggested action: Make sure that all light switches function properly. Install rechargeable, motion-sensing lights that turn on automatically to help guide you at night or during a power failure.			
14. Do your carpets and mats lie flat without wrinkles or curled edges?			
Suggested action: Remove all loose mats and rugs or ensure they are firmly secured with double-sided carpet tape or a non-slip backing so they won't slip.			
15. Are floors free of clutter?			
Suggested action: Keep items off the floor (especially in main traffic areas), as clutter is a trip hazard. Consider using tape or cable clips to secure cords, wires and cables next to the wall, so you will not trip over them.			
16. Are floor surfaces slip-resistant?			
Suggested action: You are less likely to slip on surfaces such as carpet or unglazed tiles. These surfaces are preferable to polished floors that can be slippery. Wear proper fitting shoes with non-slip soles or anti-slip slippers when walking around your home.			

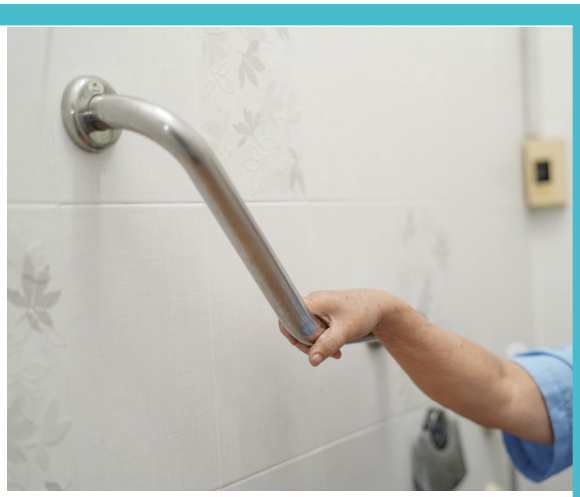
Basement & Laundry

	Yes	No	N/A
17. Are your laundry room and basement well lit?			
Suggested action: Many rooms in the basement, including the laundry room, have small windows. There should always be enough lighting where you can see all areas of the room.			
18. Can you quickly and easily access your breaker box, furnace, and other basement appliances?			
Suggested action: Quickly accessing your furnace or breaker box is critical to preventing/controlling certain incidents. Contact a professional to find out what the laws and regulations are for the areas around these and other appliances.			
19. Is there a clear path to the washer and dryer?			
Suggested action: Many laundry rooms are in storage areas or furnace rooms with open piping and wires. Make sure you can safely navigate the room while carrying your laundry items.			
20. Does your laundry room drain water properly?			
Suggested action: Keep a non-slip mat in the main laundry area as the floor can get wet. Water spills should flow naturally towards the floor drain. If you notice stagnant pools of water, contact a professional as soon as possible. Wipe up any spills immediately.			

Bathroom

	Yes	No	N/A
21. Do you use slip-resistant mats in the bathroom?			
Suggested action: Use slip-resistant mats around the shower and bath. A bath mat, paint-on or self-adhesive slip-resistant strips are advisable in the shower and bath.			
22. Are common bathroom items within easy reach?			
Suggested action: Items such as soap, shampoo and towels should be within easy reach so that you don't have to bend or reach too far for them. Remember to place soap dishes and install towel bars strategically.			
23. Is it difficult to stand during a shower?			
Suggested action: A tub or shower seat allows you to shower without getting tired or losing balance when eyes are closed. It can also reduce the need to bend to wash feet or shave legs. Consult a qualified professional to determine which model is the most appropriate for you.			
24. Are you able to use the toilet easily?			
Suggested action: Consider installing a high toilet or a raised toilet seat to help you get on and off the toilet. You may also need to install the toilet paper caddy within better reach of the seat or keep a free-standing toilet paper holder close to the toilet.			
25. Do you have grab bars near the bathtub, shower and toilet?			
Suggested action: Grab bars are recommended near the toilet. They are also useful in and around the bathtub and shower. For more information, consult the "Did you know" section below.			

Did you know?



Bathrooms can be a tricky place to maneuver. They are often small with limited space and slippery surfaces. Ensure that there is a clear path into the bathroom and keep in mind that towel bars, toilet paper holders or shower doors should not be used to hold onto or support a person's weight. These bathroom fixtures could loosen or break resulting in a serious fall.

To make the bathroom safer, install grab bars near the bathtub, shower and toilet. However, you may need to consult a qualified professional (occupational therapist or physiotherapist) to have an assessment completed to determine the most functional location and position for the safety grab bars for the person at risk for falls.

Living Room

	Yes	No	N/A
26. Can you get out of your lounge chair safely?			
Suggested action: Make sure the chair is sturdy and the proper height with arm rests that provides adequate support. If the chair is too low, add a cushion or pillow on the seat to help raise the height. You may also consider placing sturdy furniture risers underneath each leg so that the chair remains at a more convenient height.			
27. Is there adequate lighting?			
Suggested action: Increase bulb wattage to allowable limits in lamps and lights. Use additional lamps with 'clap-on' adapters to help make it easier to turn them on or off. Consider installing window coverings that allows more natural light in the room.			
28. Is your telephone within easy reach?			
Suggested action: Cordless telephones allow you to keep your telephone close to you in case of an emergency. Remember to keep the phone charged by regularly placing it in its base which should be within easy reach.			
29. Do you have a doorbell you can hear easily?			
Suggested action: Add a wireless door chime and place the chime box where you can hear it best.			

Bedroom

	Yes	No	N/A
30. Can you turn on a light before you get out of bed?			
Suggested action: Make sure that you have a light within reach of your bed and consider using a 'clap-on' adaptor for your lamp. Keep a flashlight and extra batteries in the nightstand near the bed in case of a power outage.			
31. Can you get in and out of your bed easily?			
Suggested action: Beds should be at a good height for easy movement on or off. A firm mattress will make getting into and out of bed easier. If you are having difficulty getting into or out of your bed, talk with an occupational therapist.			
32. Is the path to the nearest bathroom safe?			
Suggested action: Make sure that there is enough lighting to the nearest bathroom by installing nightlights along the way. If you wear eyeglasses, make sure they are on the nightstand within reach.			
33. Is your closet safe?			
Suggested action: Make sure to remove all clutter. Use baskets to keep small and loose items together. Only store lighter items on the top shelves.			

Kitchen

	Yes	No	N/A
34. Do your cabinet doors and drawers close all of the way?			
Suggested action: Doors and cabinets should close all of the way so you don't unexpectedly walk into one. If possible, renovate the doors/drawers with a "soft-close" feature which will close them the last few inches for you.			
35. Can you easily reach kitchen items you use regularly?			
Suggested action: Arrange your kitchen so the most frequently used items are easy to reach without climbing, bending or losing your balance. Store these items at or near chest level with your large or heavier items in lower cupboards and lighter items up high.			
36. Do you keep a step stool in your kitchen?			
Suggested action: A sturdy step stool is a must for any kitchen. This prevents the urge to stand on a chair or counter top to reach high items, which is dangerous. It is recommended to use a step stool that has been approved by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA).			
37. Do you have a non-slip mat in front of your kitchen sink?			
Suggested action: A non-slip mat will help prevent a fall if you spill water while doing dishes or if there is an unexpected leak in your sink causing the floor to be wet.			
38. Is there good ventilation to reduce the risk of eyeglasses fogging?			
Suggested action: Range hoods, vents or exhaust fans can be installed to provide better ventilation when cooking.			

Did you know?

As we age, our vision can weaken. Adding proper lighting will help you find your way around the kitchen and make it easier for you to avoid injury. Install extra lighting at the range, sink, over countertops and other work areas to ensure these areas are well-lit. Light switches should be located at all entrances to the kitchen. You can also use nightlights to help you see more clearly in low light situations.



Fire Safety Concerns

	Yes	No	N/A
39. Do you smoke in your home?			
Suggested action: Smoking inside your house can be hazardous. We recommend and encourage ALL seniors and adults to quit smoking in order to help reduce the risk of fire at home in addition to decreasing the risk of serious health problems. However, if you are a senior smoker, make sure you never smoke in bed or anywhere home oxygen is used.			
40. Are smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms installed and working?			
Suggested action: Make sure that you have a smoke detector and a carbon monoxide alarm on every floor of your home, especially near sleeping areas. Test the alarms once a month to make sure the battery is working and that you can hear the alarm from your bedroom. Change the batteries at least once a year or whenever the alarm "chirps" to tell you that the battery power is low. Any alarm that is 10 years old should be replaced.			
41. Is there a fire extinguisher in the house?			
Suggested action: Have at least one easily accessible fire extinguisher in your home. Make sure that you use the right type of fire extinguisher and that you know how to operate it properly. However, if a fire becomes large, get out of the house immediately since fire extinguishers are designed to put out small fires, not large ones. Keep in mind that you should know the easiest way to leave your home and be familiar with at least 2 exit ways.			
42. Is your fireplace or wood-stove safe?			
Suggested action: It is important to keep an area of at least one metre around the stove or fireplace clear of anything that might catch fire or overheat. You may need to install a heat shield behind or beside the stove to prevent heat damage to any nearby walls. Remember to always use a screen in front of your fireplace. Never leave your house or go to bed when a fire is still burning.			

Did you know?

To prevent creosote from building up in your chimney flue, do not burn cardboard, trash or green wood. Burning too much wood at once can also cause tar and creosote to build up, which creates a fire hazard. If you use a fireplace or a wood-stove at home, make sure to regularly have the chimney cleaned and serviced by a professional.



Other Safety Concerns

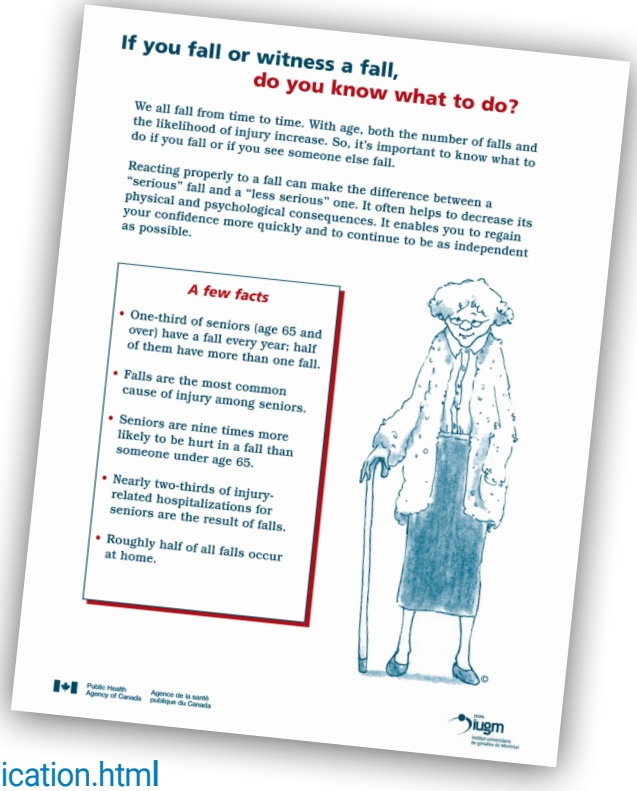
	Yes	No	N/A
43. Is your furniture placed so that you can use your walking aid easily in your home?			
Suggested action: Remove or reorganize furniture in order to provide enough space so that a walking aid can be used easily. Remove purely decorative items like large potted plants that may obstruct movement.			
44. Do you have any pets in your home?			
Suggested action: Having a pet around the home can help to ease stress and loneliness. However, it can also lead to more messes and unintentional injury when interacting with them. Make sure to clean up spills from water bowls and food crumbs which can cause slips. Clear floor areas, hallways and stairs of any toys. Always watch that your pets are not underfoot.			
45. Do you know what to do in case of an emergency?			
Suggested action: Prepare in advance for an emergency. We recommend that you have a list of emergency numbers near all phones. In addition, consider purchasing a one button medical alert system to help you with emergency response if you are unable to use your phone.			

Do you know what to do?

If you fall or if you witness a fall, you should know the best and safest way to get up without risking further injury. It is important to remember that reacting properly to a fall can help to limit any physical and psychological consequences.

Although you may feel shocked, remaining calm will help you to assess the situation. What you do next will depend on if you're hurt and whether you're able to get up without help.

For more information, we recommend that you consult this useful step by step guide that was developed by the Public Health Agency of Canada.


If you fall or witness a fall,
do you know what to do?

We all fall from time to time. With age, both the number of falls and the likelihood of injury increase. So, it's important to know what to do if you fall or if you see someone else fall.

Reacting properly to a fall can make the difference between a "serious" fall and a "less serious" one. It often helps to decrease its physical and psychological consequences. It enables you to regain your confidence more quickly and to continue to be as independent as possible.

A few facts

- One-third of seniors (age 65 and over) have a fall every year; half of them have more than one fall.
- Falls are the most common cause of injury among seniors.
- Seniors are nine times more likely to be hurt in a fall than someone under age 65.
- Nearly two-thirds of injury-related hospitalizations for seniors are the result of falls.
- Roughly half of all falls occur at home.

Public Health Agency of Canada / Agence de la santé publique du Canada

http://www.publications.gc.ca/site/eng/340342/publication.html



NS Department of Health and Wellness, and our provincial stakeholders, would like to remind you that most injuries can be prevented!

We encourage everyone to learn more about how to stay safe during winter months.

For more fall prevention information and resources for older adults, caregivers, and healthcare professionals, please visit www.FindingBalanceNS.ca

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