

How to prevent falls in your home and when you go outside

5C Research Study Resource

Information for older adults

Read this resource to learn:

- Why you should be concerned about falls
- How you can make your home safer
- How you can stay safe when you go outside
- What to do if you fall

Why should I be concerned about falls?

Anyone can fall, but as you grow older the risk of falling increases.

One out of three people aged 65 and older fall each year. Those who fall are more likely to fall again. About half of all falls happen at home.

Your risk of falling may be greater if:

- your health has changed
- you are taking medicine
- you have had surgery

The good news is that you can take steps to lower your risk of falling.

What can happen if you fall?

Falls can cause minor injuries such as bruises or sprains. Falls can also result in very severe injuries such as a broken hip. Falls can lead to:

- A hospital stay
- A fear of falling which may limit the things you can do. When a person is less active, they become weaker. Becoming weaker can increase your risk of falls.
- A loss of independence. This could mean that you cannot live in your house anymore. It could mean having someone help you with all the things you need and want to do.

Did you know that YOU can prevent falls?

- ✓ Know what you can do to stay safe and reduce your chances of falling.
- ✓ Follow the tips in this pamphlet to help you enjoy living in your home as long as possible.

Stay healthy

- Stay as active as you can. Regular exercise improves your balance and strength, which can prevent falls. Do exercises that improve your balance and strength like stretching and walking. You can do strength exercises while sitting to keep yourself stable.

Talk to your doctor or nurse before starting an exercise program.

- Review your medicines with your doctor or pharmacist. Some medicines can make you dizzy or sleepy. Always follow the instructions your doctor gave you about taking your medicines.
- Have your doctor check your blood pressure. Low blood pressure may cause people to feel dizzy.
- Have your hearing checked on a regular basis. When you are trying to focus on hearing, it makes it hard to focus on balance. Loss of hearing also makes you less aware of what is going on around you.
- Have your eyes checked at least once a year. Wear your glasses. Poor vision can increase your risk of falling.

- Eat regular, healthy meals and drink enough fluids. Ask to speak with a dietitian if you have questions about food and diet.
- Be careful about drinking alcohol. Alcohol can make you drowsy. Alcohol may also affect how your other medicines work, which can increase your risk of falling.

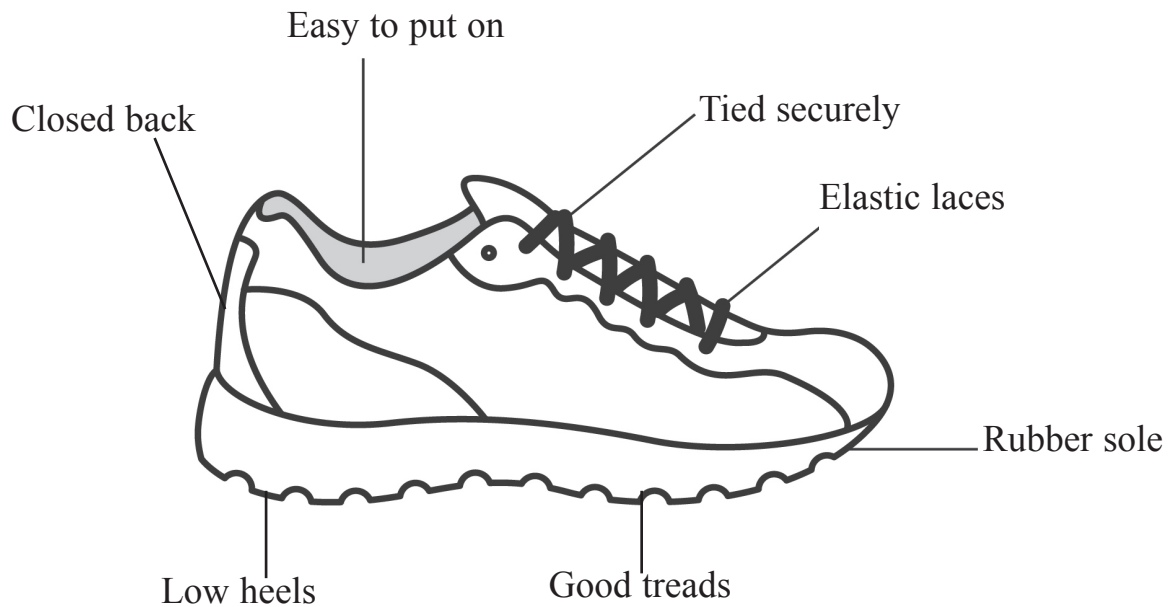
Wear shoes and clothes that fit well

- Always wear shoes in your home, not just socks.

Wear shoes or slippers that:

- ✓ fit well and feel comfortable.
- ✓ are easy to get on and off.
- ✓ support your feet well.
- ✓ have rubber soles that do not slip.
- ✓ have a closed back.

- Tie shoelaces or fasten the straps securely. You may find it easier to use elastic shoelaces instead of regular ones.
- Do not wear clothes such as pants, skirts, nightgowns or bathrobes that are too long. They could make you trip and fall.



Move about carefully

- Use your walking aid every time you get up.
- Do not rush. Take your time. Pay full attention to what you are doing. Take a break if you get tired.
- Be careful that you do not trip over your pet. Put a bell on your pet's collar so you know where he or she is.
- Get up slowly after sitting to avoid feeling dizzy. This prevents a sudden drop in your blood pressure. It is easier to sit down and stand up from a chair with armrests. Ask for help if you need it. If you often feel dizzy or lightheaded, see your doctor.

- Ask for help. Many falls result from reaching, climbing, or standing on unsteady chairs.

If you need a walking cane, make sure it fits well and has a rubber tip. When you buy a cane, have a physiotherapist or health care expert make sure the cane is the proper fit. Replace the tips when they become worn out.

To measure your cane:

- Turn the cane upside down and put the handle on the floor.
- Stand with your arms by the sides of your body with elbows slightly bent.
- The tip of the cane should be at the level of your wrist.



To adjust your cane:

For Wooden Canes:

- When your cane is upside down, mark the cane at the level of your wrist.
- Remove the rubber tip.
- Cut the cane half an inch shorter than where you marked it.
- Replace the rubber tip.

For Aluminum Canes:

- Most aluminum canes can be easily adjusted within an inch of the desired height.

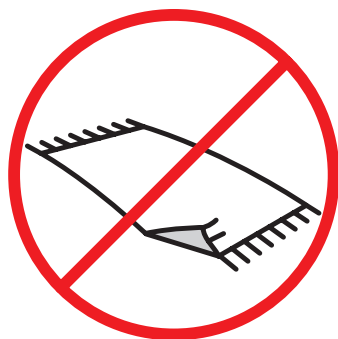
How you can make your home safer

Use this booklet to check in and around your home for any hazards that could cause a fall. Make a plan to fix them as soon as possible.

You may need to ask a friend, family member or neighbour to help you make some of these changes.

Keep your path clear

- Make sure all hallways, stairs, and rooms are free of clutter. Having less clutter will make it easier to walk through your home with your cane or walker.
- Remove any loose rugs or carpets that are torn. Secure carpets to the floor by taping down the edges.
- Move electrical and phone cords out of the way so you will not trip over them.
- Move furniture out of your path, so you can easily walk around and reach light switches and doors.

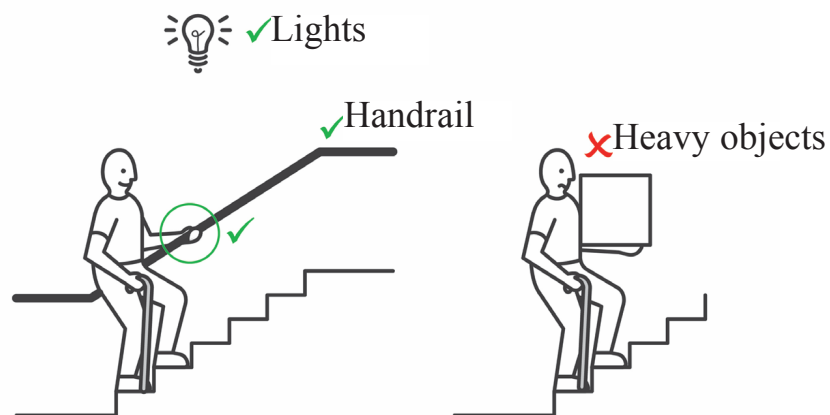


Lighting

- Make sure there is enough light in all rooms and hallways. Make sure there are lights over all stairs.
- Make sure you can reach light switches easily. Lamps and light switches should be close to the entrances of your rooms. If they are not, make sure they are easy to get to.
- Leave a light on at night.

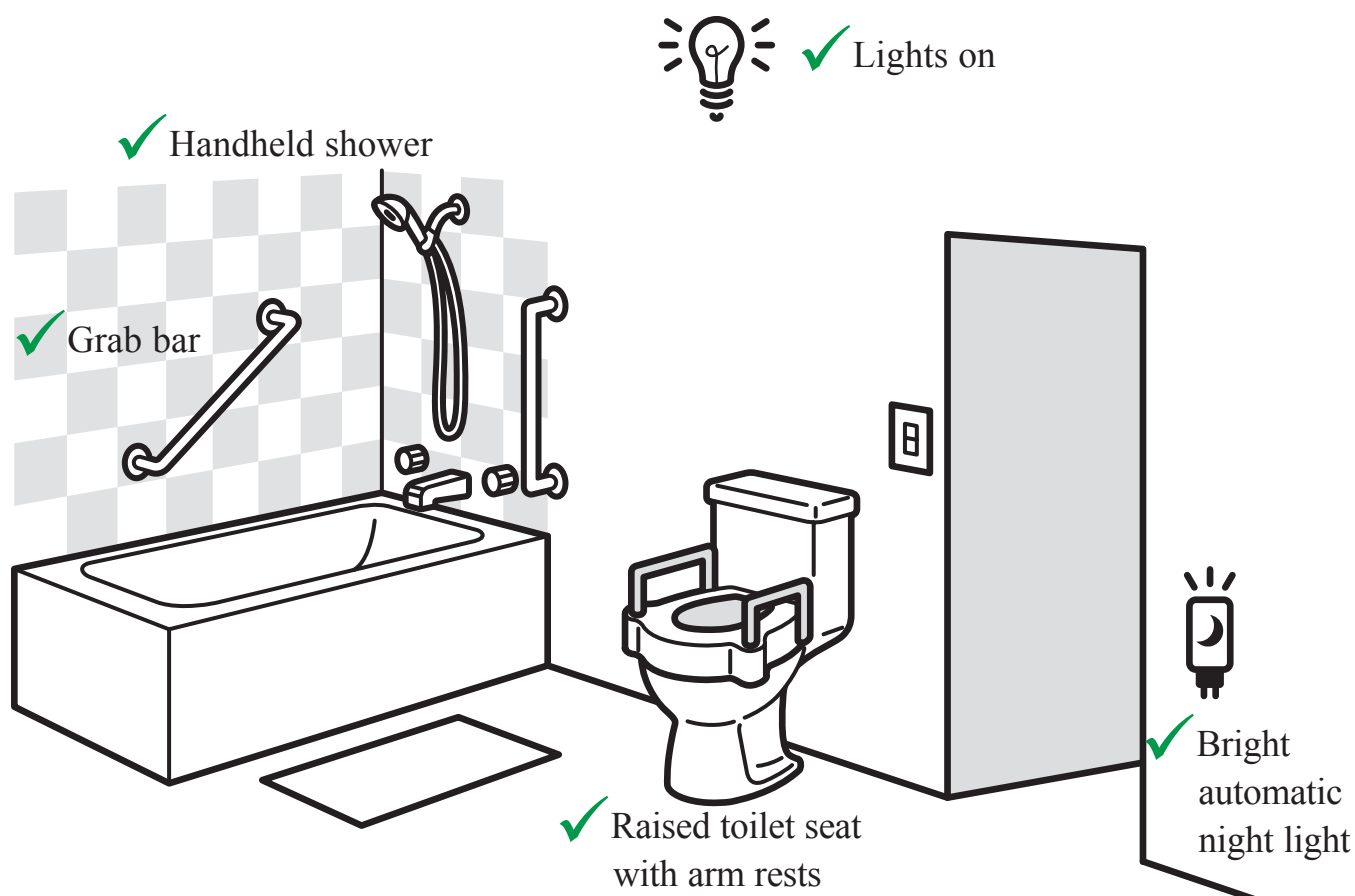
Stairs

- Make sure there is a secure handrail along the full length of each stair case.
- Hold onto the handrail and take your time going up or down the stairs.
- Make sure your stairs are well lit so that you can see each step clearly.
- Use non-slip paint, tape or stair treads.
- Have a contrasting colour painted on the edge of each step. A contrasting colour will make it easier to see each step. For example, use a light color of paint on dark wood.
- Do not try to carry heavy objects on stairs. Ask for help when possible



Bathroom

- Use a non-slip rubber mat inside and outside the bathtub or shower. Do not use a towel as a floor mat, you could trip and fall.
- Turn on the light when you use the bathroom. If the room is well lit it is easier to see things on the floor.
- Put a night light in the bathroom.
- Install secure grab bars next to the toilet and in the tub or shower. Ask your therapist about a raised toilet seat or handheld shower to help you stay safe.
- Use a bath bench to help you get in and out of the bathtub safely.
- Never hold onto the towel bar, soap dish, curtain or shower rod for support. These items do not provide a secure support.
- Dry up any water that spills onto the floor so you do not slip.



Bedroom

- Keep a phone, lamp, flash light and your glasses beside your bed.
- Keep your walking aid close enough to reach when you get out of bed.
- Turn on the light before getting out of bed.
- Take your time getting in and out of bed. Sit on the side of your bed before standing up to avoid feeling dizzy.
- Make sure the path from your bed to the bathroom is clear and well lit.
- Make sure you can easily get in and out of bed. Talk to your therapist about what is the right bed height for you.
- Remove long bed skirts or blankets



✓ Lights on



✓ Take your time

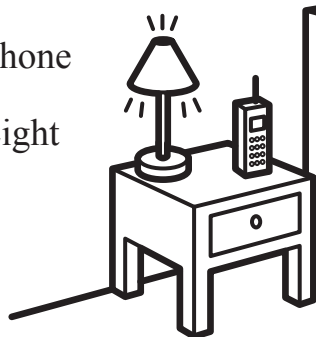


✓ Mobility device

✓ Proper footwear

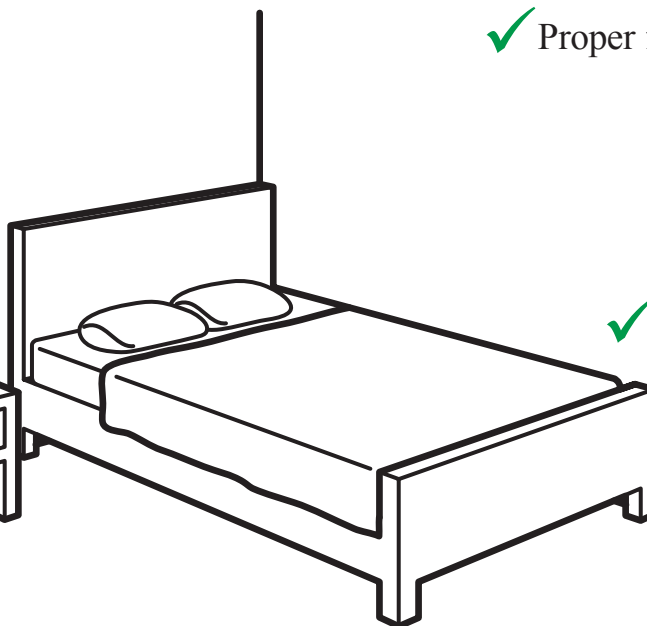
✓ Phone

✓ Light



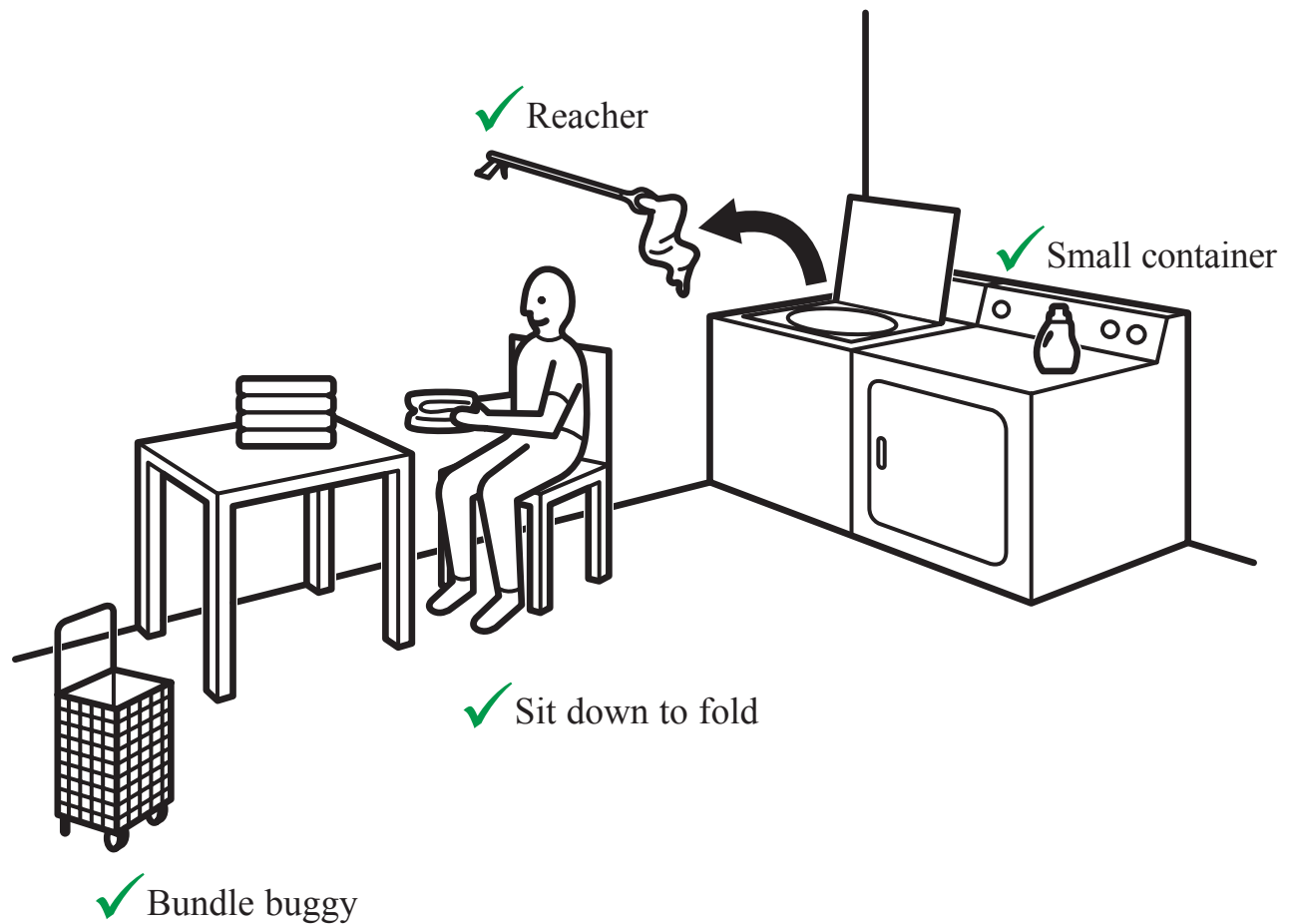
✓ Short blanket

✓ Bed height



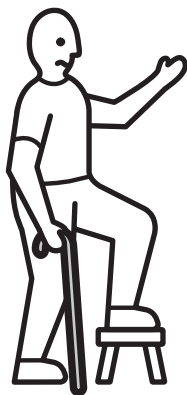
Laundry

- Carry small loads of laundry in a zippered bag or a bundle buggy.
- Use a reacher to load and unload clothing from the washer and dryer.
- Carry laundry detergent in a small, light container.
- Sit down to fold your laundry to save your energy.



Kitchen

- Keep things you use often within reach (between shoulder and hip level). You can also buy tools like reachers or grabbers to help you avoid bending or reaching too far.
- Use long-handled mops to clean spills.
- Do not stand on stools, ladders or chairs.
- Slide items along the countertop to help move items.
- Do not carry items in your hands while using your walker.
- Store food or liquids in sealed and insulated containers.
- When food shopping, carry sealed food and drinks in a grocery bag. Put the grocery bag over your shoulder or tied securely to your walker.
- Do not hold onto fridge or cupboard doors for support.
- Use smaller appliances that turn off by themselves.
For example, an automatic kettle and toaster oven.
- Sit to prepare food or wash dishes.
- Clean up spills on the floor as soon as you can, so you do not slip.



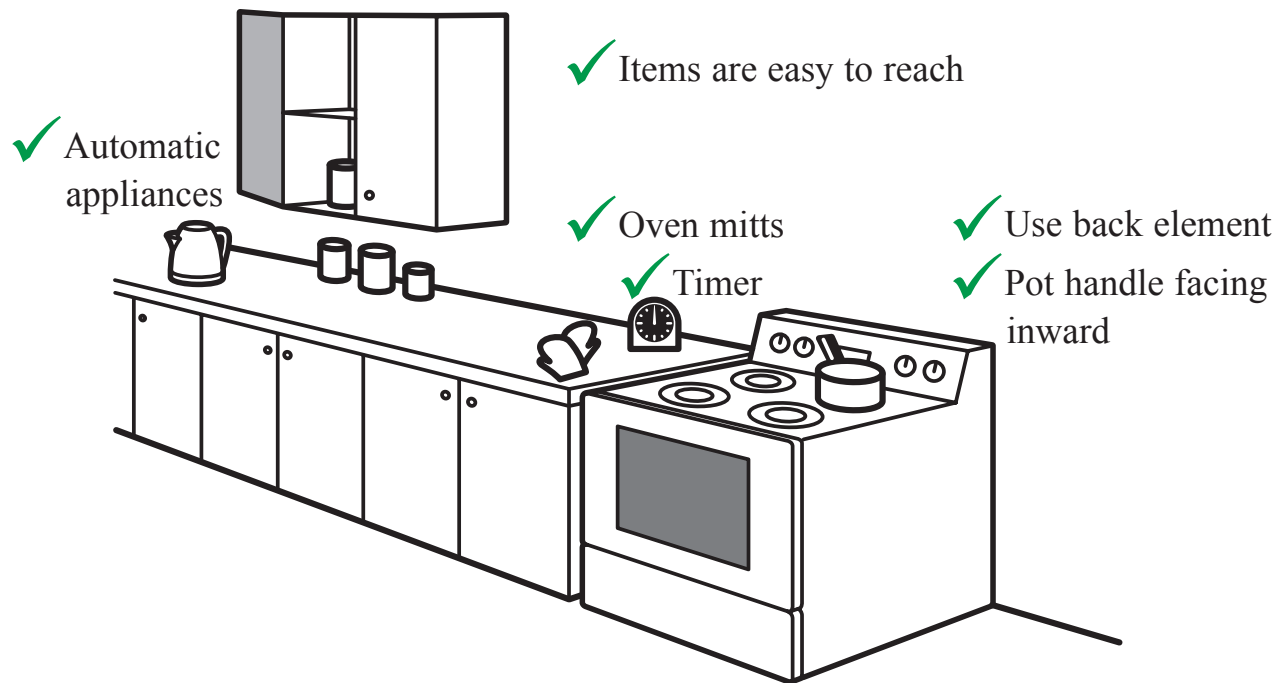
Do not stand on stools, chairs or ladders.



Do not carry items in your hands while using your walker.

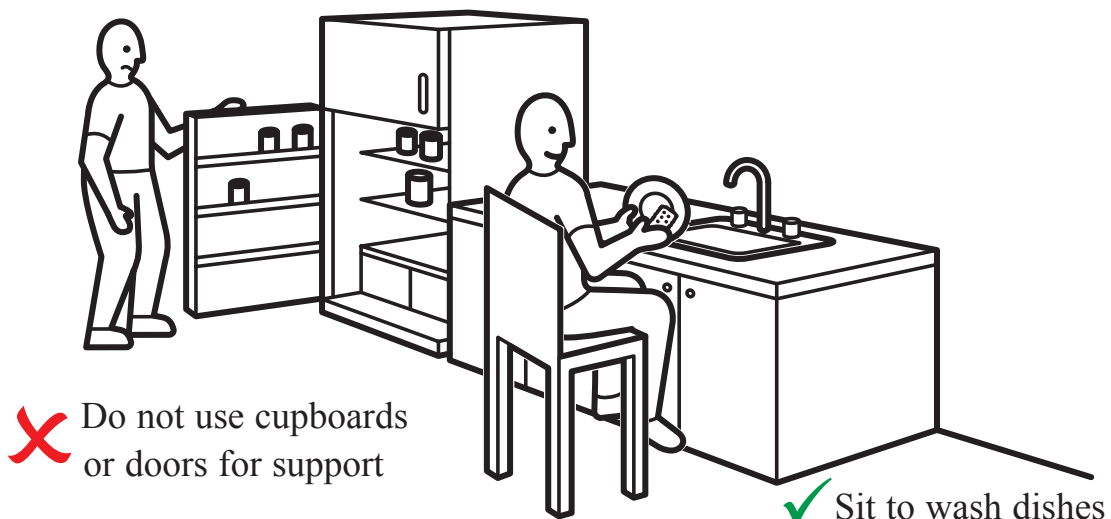


Carry sealed items in a bag. Always keep both hands on your walker.



If you use the stove, remember to:

- ✓ Use back elements to cook.
- ✓ Turn pot handles to the back of the stove.
- ✓ Use oven mitts or pot holders to remove items from the stove.
- ✓ Make sure stove dials are clearly marked.
- ✓ Use a timer to remind you to turn off the stove.



Other safety tips

- Have a plan for help if you fall.
- Have a plan and escape route in case of fire.
- Keep a list of emergency telephone numbers by all phones.
- Have a daily phone buddy. Find someone who can check in with you to make sure you are safe.
- Carry a fully-charged cordless or mobile phone. Enter emergency phone numbers in the phone's contact list.
- Have a first aid kit. Make a note of where you keep it.
- Contact your family doctor right away after a fall if you:
 - hit your head or back. Contact your doctor even if you are not bleeding or feeling pain after the fall.
 - feel different than you normally do.
 - have new or worse pain after the fall.
 - have large bruises or many bruises.
- If you take blood thinners, falls can cause bruises or cuts to be more serious than normal.
 - If you are bleeding, put pressure on any cuts or scrapes. Use a tissue or clean cloth if you have one. It may take up to 20 minutes for the bleeding to stop. If the bleeding does not stop after 20 minutes, continue to apply pressure and go to the nearest emergency room.
 - If the cut is large and bleeding a lot, use pressure and get help right away. Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. Tell the nurse or doctor that you are taking a blood thinner.

- Consider buying a personal alarm device. Choose a pendant (see image to the right) or wristband that you can use to alert medical services if you fall. Some medical alarms will call for help on their own if they detect you have fallen.
- Have a smoke and carbon monoxide detector on each level of your home. Change the batteries every 6 months. For example, change the batteries when the clocks change in the spring and fall.



How to stay safe when you go outside

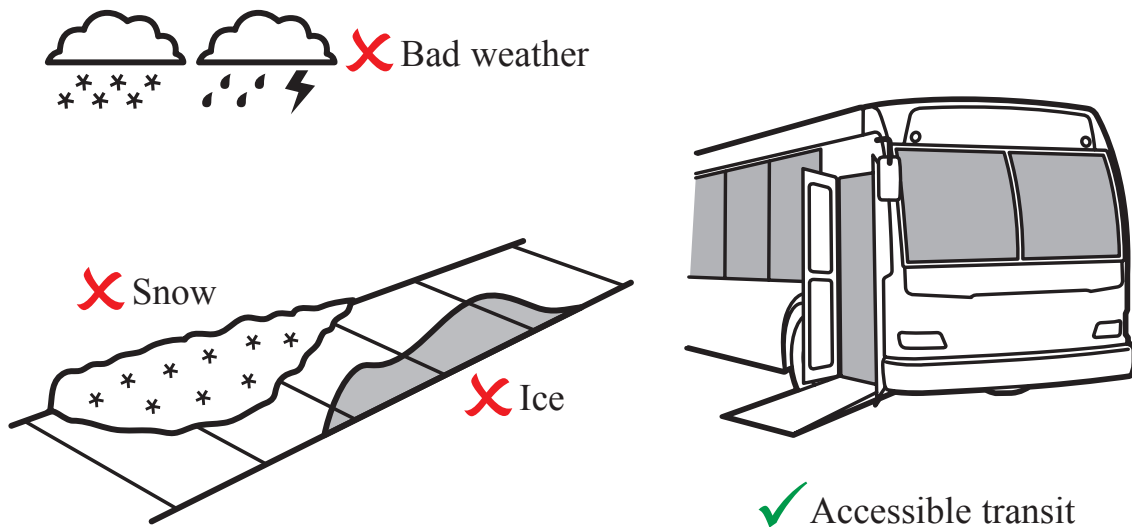
Keep areas around your home safe

- Make sure porches, decks, sidewalks and paths around your home are well lit.
- Make sure your outdoor stairs, pathways or decks have railings.
- Make sure outdoor stairs, pathways and decks surfaces have good traction so they are not slippery.
- Make sure the number of your house is well lit and easily seen from the street. This will allow emergency services to find your house easily.
- Keep your walkways clear of leaves, snow and ice.
- Repair broken, loose or uneven surfaces.

Before leaving home

- Check the weather. Avoid going out when the weather is bad. If you must go out:
 - Use cane spikes on icy days if you use a cane. Cane spikes fit over the end of your cane for extra grip.
 - Wear proper footwear. Wear light boots with a rubber sole and good treads in the winter and when it rains.
- Plan outings during less busy times of the day.
- Let a family member or friend know that you are going out and what time you will return home.

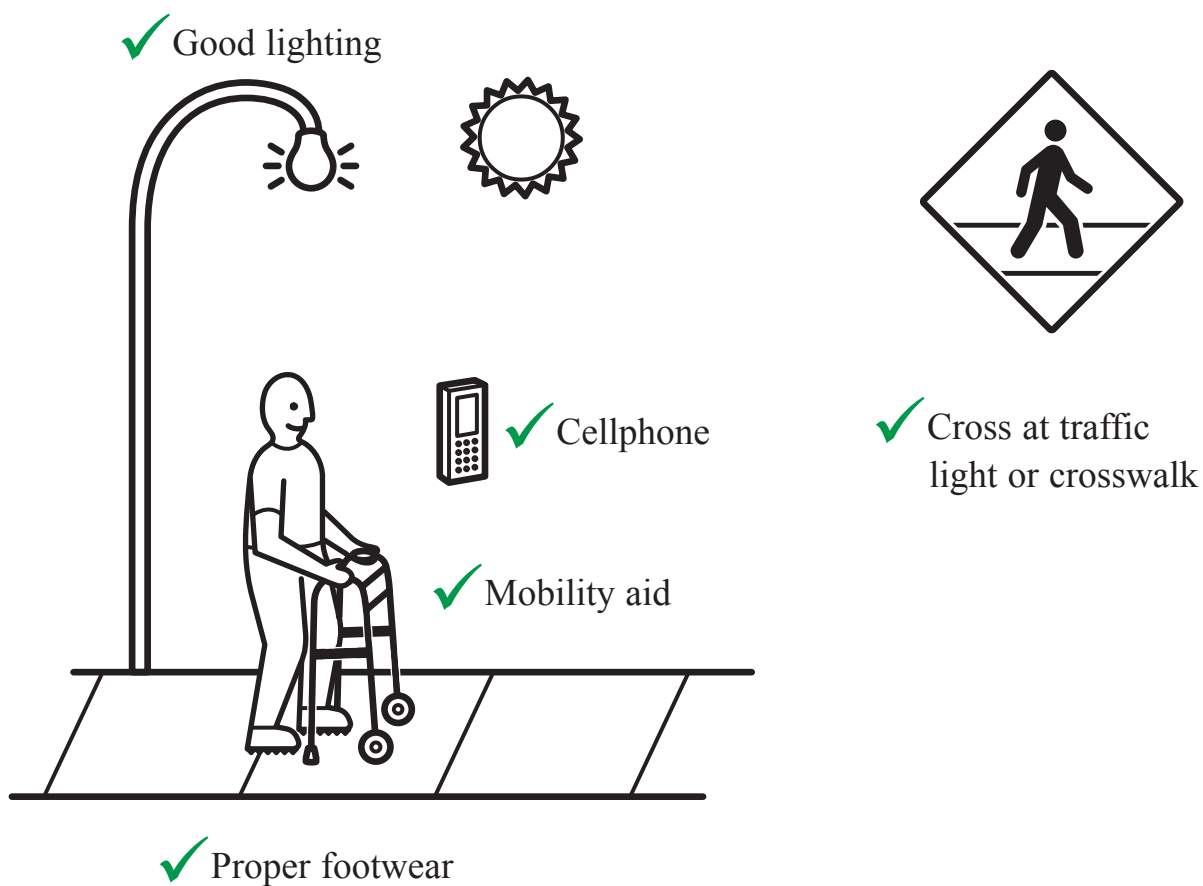
- Arrange for accessible transit like buses if needed. Accessible transit uses special vehicles for people who have trouble getting in and out of standard vehicles.
- Place a chair near the door so you can sit down to put your shoes or boots on and off.



When you go out

- Carry a cell phone to call for help if needed.
- Use your outdoor walking aid.
- Be visible to drivers. Wear bright, reflective clothes so drivers can see you.
- Be as light as possible. Avoid carrying things that can weigh you down or affect your balance.
- When getting in and out of a car, do not hold onto the door for support. It may move and you could get hurt.
- Walk along paths that are well lit.

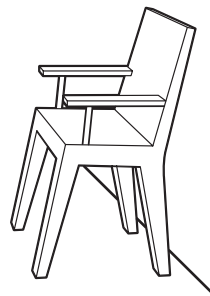
- Use sidewalks that are clear of ice, snow or wet leaves.
- Always cross the street at traffic lights and crosswalks.
- Be very careful when stepping on and off an elevator or escalator.



What to do if you fall

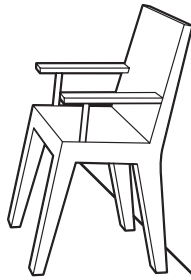
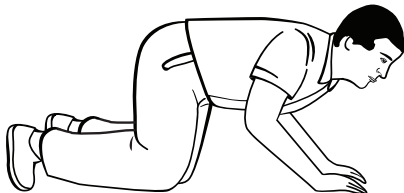
What to do if you fall and are not hurt

1.



- Find a sturdy piece of furniture such as a sturdy armchair.
- Bend your top knee and roll onto your side.

2.



- Get up on your hands and knees.
- Crawl towards the sturdy chair.
- If you cannot crawl then drag yourself to the sturdy chair.

3.



- Put your hands on the chair.
- Place the foot of your stronger leg flat on the floor.

4.



- Stand up.

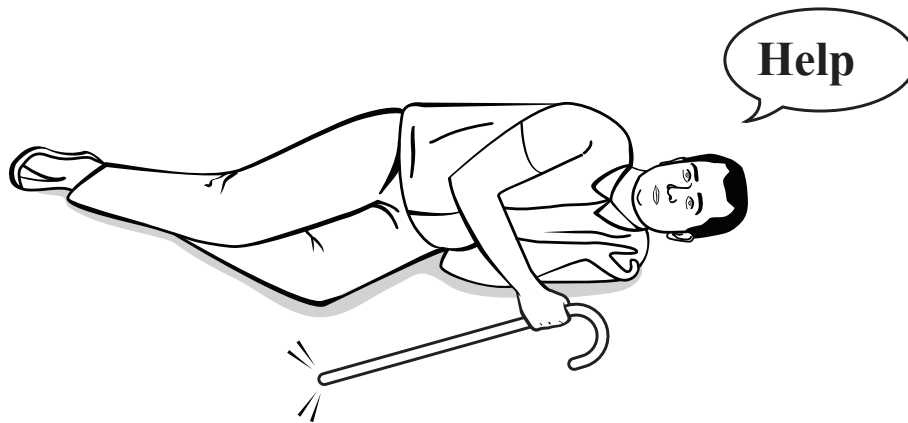
5.



- Slowly turn and sit down.
- Call for help.

If you are hurt, do not try to get up:

- If you are wearing a medical alarm, such as a pendant or bracelet, press it to call for help.
- If not, try to crawl towards a phone, door or hallway.
- Call 911 or yell “I have fallen and need help!”
- Alert others by making a loud noise. For example, use an object like your cane to bang on the wall.



What should you do until help arrives?

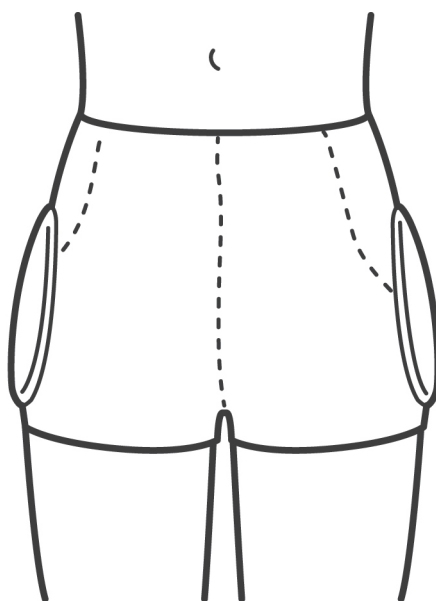
- Try to stay warm. Look for clothing, a towel or blanket to cover yourself.
- If you soil yourself, try to roll away from the damp area.
- Gently move your unhurt arms and legs to keep blood flowing.
- Try to change your position often to ease pressure on your skin.

How your therapists can help

Physiotherapists and occupational therapists can help you to prevent falls.

Your therapists can:

- Assess how well you move and walk.
- Let you know which walking aid is right for you. Walking aids such as canes and walkers provide extra support. They also make you steadier on your feet. Your therapist will make sure your walking aid fits well. They will also show you how to use your walking aid in the correct way.
- Suggest equipment to help you be more safe in your home.
- Give you advice about wearing hip protectors. Hip protectors are underwear with pads on the outside of each hip and leg. The pads absorb some of the impact in a fall. This could prevent your hip from breaking.
- Give you more information and resources to help you stay safe in your community.



✓ Hip protector

Your action plan

1.What changes will you make to prevent falls?

2.What other tips do your therapists suggest?

Adapted from "Home Safety" and "Preventing Falls at Home" with permission from the University Health Network Patient and Caregiver Education Program.

Adapted from "Is Your Cane the Correct Height" with permission from Toronto Public Health