



**Grey Bruce Health Network**

## **EVIDENCE-BASED CARE PROGRAM**

# **Working Together to Prevent Falls**



This package is intended to provide people that have had a fall or are at risk of falling with some suggestions to prevent further accidents. Many falls can be prevented!

The amount of information may seem overwhelming at first. We suggest that you take a glance through the booklet to see what information is available and then read the items that most interest you. Share the booklet with your family or friends and come back to it at a later time.

If you have any questions about the information, you may contact the physiotherapy department closest to you.

Please enjoy. Be willing to learn a few new things and be open to trying some new things.

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**The Safe Living Guide** - this booklet has been provided by Health Canada. It may look imposing, but it is quite easy to read. Please read the Home Safety Checklists on pages 9-17. Be aware of the importance of home safety, the equipment you may purchase to assist you, the effects of aging, the need to be active, effects of medication, safe use of alcohol and resources available to you.



## Home Safety Checklist

- Consider putting safety rails in your bathroom
- Remove scatter rugs
- Be cautious of pets that may be underfoot
- Take your walker with you when you move around the house
- Ensure there is a clear path between rooms, and remove any clutter
- Ensure you have railings on stairways
- Consider having your home assessed for dangers by the Community Care Access Centre (*for contact information see "Community Resources"*)
- Consider purchasing a cordless telephone
- Keep emergency telephone numbers handy
- Consider having an emergency response system installed in your home \*
- Remember to take your medication

\* *For more information about Emergency Response Systems, contact the South West Community Care Access Centre at (519) 371-2112*

## Taking Good Care of Yourself

In general terms, the better your overall health, the safer you will be from falling. You, therefore, need to think about your physical health and also your mental and social well-being.

### **Physical Well-Being**

Physical well-being is maintained by:

- A nutritious diet
- Appropriate physical activity
- A good balance of rest and activity
- Regular medical checks (including teeth, eyes, ears and feet)

You may not need the same quantity of food as you did when you were younger, but you certainly still need quality and variety. Keep a good balanced diet. If you are alone and find cooking for one unappealing, try to find a friend in similar circumstances. Take turns cooking and eat together a couple of times each week.



Physical activity is so important that it has a section of its own in this booklet. There is a level of physical activity appropriate to every stage of life. The benefits continue all through life, too.

Striking the right balance between rest and activity is crucial – they depend upon and nourish each other.

It's also important to have your eyes and ears tested regularly. A simple thing like having earwax removed can improve your balance and help keep you safer from falling.

### **Mental Well-Being**

Mental well-being is an individual thing. One person may find stimulation in a crossword puzzle, another in playing chess and another attending classes at a School for Seniors or University of the Third Age. If you live in an isolated place, your choice may be radio or television's Open Learning programmes. Retirement can open up so many wonderful new opportunities to plunge into those things you've always wanted to do, but never managed to fit in.

Fear of falling can seriously affect mental well-being. For some people it is so strong that they stay at home, reducing both their activities and social contact. They become more isolated and lonely. By being less active, their muscles weaken and joints stiffen, making them more likely to fall.

This is the kind of situation where the support and encouragement of friends and family can be very helpful. Unfortunately, it is also the kind of situation where well-meaning friends and family often discourage an older person from being active. This can be very unhelpful. Friends and family may need to set aside their own fears and anxieties in order to assist an older person. “Let’s go for a walk together” will do more good than “You sit there and take it easy”.

## Social Well-Being

Social well-being is closely linked to mental well-being. Because humans are basically social creatures, a lonely person finds it harder to maintain a healthy outlook than does one who is involved and active. Staying in touch with life seems to be the answer – take part in activities and clubs, pursue a hobby, continue your education, write letters – these are all possibilities. In your locality there may be gentle exercise classes, walking or swimming groups, music or discussion groups. Voluntary organizations always need more helpers and will make you welcome.



You need to think also about circumstances that can affect your well-being and make you more vulnerable to some kind of injury. Many injuries are unintentional happenings that can be prevented by concentrating. You may have to work at not being distracted, but preventing a fall is worth it.

There will be times of distress as friends and loved ones become ill or die, your financial situation worsens or you face other life events you can’t predict or control. At these times you are less likely to be taking good care of yourself. Try talking about your feelings with a friend. Providing a listening ear is what friendship is for and it’s surprising how helpful simply talking can be. Or you could try one of the caring, confidential telephone services. They are listed in the front part of the telephone directory under “Community Health and Welfare”. Your local Council and Community Health Centre will also be able to help with local services. Remember, bottled up feelings act like a pressure cooker, so letting them out in a safe way is always beneficial.

*Adapted with permission from Stay on Your Feet, Northern Rivers Institute of Health and Research, 1999*

## What Makes a Shoe “Safe”?

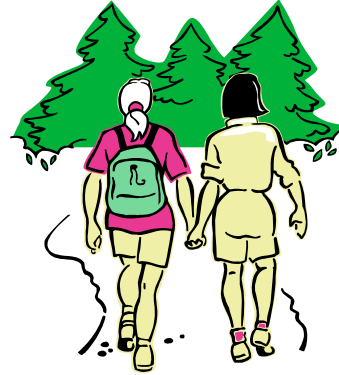
Of all the steps you can take to be safer from falling, choosing safe footwear is probably the easiest.

### **Good fit**

This is the most important feature to look for when choosing a safe shoe. A poor fit can cause you to change your usual way of walking and even upset your balance.

### **Laces or “Velcro” fastenings**

Well tied laces are the best choice. If you find tying the laces difficult, look for little gadgets called “No Bows One-Handed Shoelace Fasteners”. Alternatively, some shoes have “Velcro” fastenings that are easily managed.



### **A lot of contact with the ground**

Flat shoes with low broad heels give your feet the greatest area of contact with the ground and offer good stability. High or narrow heels cut down the contact area and reduce stability. If you can't quite give up heels, why not compromise? You could choose wedge heels or medium-height broad heels.

### **A sole that grips**

The grip can come from the material used, from a pattern imprinted into the sole of the shoes, or both. You will appreciate the extra security of good grip, particularly when walking on wet or shiny surfaces (but remember, you'll need to pick up your feet – a sole that grips won't allow you to shuffle).

### **A rounded edge to the heel**

Falls often result when a sharp heel edge hits a wet or shiny surface and the wearer slips. High heels usually have these unsafe sharp edges. Jogging shoes have a rounded edge to the heel, so look for something similar in your everyday shoes.

When you're buying new shoes, choose those with some of these safety features. Some safe shoes are appearing on the market and you can encourage the manufacturers and retailers to provide more by asking for them.

Shoe repairers are often very safety conscious. They can apply vulcanized rubber heels and half-soles to your existing shoes, and this will increase grip. Some will reduce the cost to people over 60 years. One good suggestion is to have every new pair of shoes treated this way. They will then last much longer as well.



### So what is appropriate?

The shoe should suit the activity. If you plan to do a lot of walking, for instance, shoes designed especially for walking will serve you well. When you are shopping for special purpose shoes, remember that the most expensive are not necessarily the best value.

And let's think about indoor footwear, too. A great many falls happen inside the home and ill-fitting slippers, scuffs or thongs are often the cause. A poorly-fitting slipper can make you shuffle and so a trip or slip becomes more likely. The same applies to scuffs and thongs, which neither fit nor give support. You will be safer if you avoid them altogether. Choose instead footwear that is enclosed at the front and back, fits properly and supports you so that you can walk comfortably and naturally.



Another point worth mentioning is the value of keeping your shoes clean. Think about how often you walk through public places that are not very clean and how oil, grease, fat, food scraps, dust and dirt play a part in causing falls. That's why regularly checking your shoes, particularly the soles, is so important.

*Adapted with permission from Stay on Your Feet, Northern Rivers Institute of Health and Research, 1999*

## If the Shoe Fits...Tips for Comfortable Shoe Fit

*Treat your feet right! They support you. You need to support them. Wear shoes that fit.*

Poorly fitting shoes can cause painful bunions, corns, calluses, hammertoes and other foot problems. Improper footwear can also contribute to pain syndromes in the ankle, knee, hip and back. You can prevent some of these problems by paying attention to how you select your new shoes and by replacing worn-out footwear promptly.

Here are some suggestions on proper shoe fit:

1. Sizes vary among shoe brands and styles. Don't select shoes by the size marked in side the shoe. **Judge the shoe by how it fits on your foot.**
2. Select a shoe that conforms to the shape of your foot.
3. **Have your feet measured regularly.** The size of your feet changes, as you grow older.
4. **Have BOTH feet measured.** Most people have one foot larger than the other. Fit to the largest foot.
5. **Fit at the end of the day** when your feet are the largest.
6. **Stand during the fitting process** and check that there is enough space (3/8" to 1/2") for your longest toe at the end of each shoe.
7. **Check for adequate shoe width at the widest point of your foot** – the ball of the foot.
8. **Ensure that there is enough width and depth in the toe-box** to avoid pressure on your toes.
9. **The back of the shoe should be snug around your heel and the uppers should hold your foot securely.** Shoes fastened with laces or Velcro hold your foot in the shoe better than a slip-on shoe.
10. **Select a shoe with a cushioned sole** to absorb weight-bearing impact.
11. **Don't purchase shoes that feel too tight**, expecting them to stretch to fit.
12. **Walk in the shoe to make sure it fits and feels right!**

*Information provided courtesy of Rehab Express*

## Nutrition



Healthy eating habits never get old! Eating well protects us from illness and promotes independence in later years. Healthy eating and regular activity will help us look and feel our best ... and give us the energy to get going and keep going.

As we get older, we need fewer calories, but almost the same amounts of nutrients (carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins and minerals) to fuel our bodies. Daily choices of grain products, vegetables and fruits, milk products, meats and meat alternatives will provide a good mix of all the nutrients we need. Each food group in Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating provides an array of vitamins and minerals important to our aging bodies.

As a general rule, at each meal, try to include foods chosen from three of the four food groups. If you feel this is too much food at one time, opt for smaller servings. Include snacks if you are having smaller meals so there is a better chance that your body will get the nutrients it needs. Consult a dietitian to help you develop a menu that will meet your needs.

*Adapted from the Dietitians of Canada website*

## Healthy Eating Checklist

*What changes could help improve your eating habits? This checklist can help you decide.*

- ◆ **I eat at least three meals a day at regular times.**

**Yes                      No**

You need to eat a variety of foods from all four food groups. This will give your body all the protein, vitamins, minerals and energy you need. Regular meals and healthy snacks help keep your energy up. Regular meals help make sure you eat enough. If people offer to help you with meals let them - you may need more support when you get home.

- ◆ **I eat 5 or more servings of grains each day. At least 3 servings are whole grains.**

**Yes                      No**

Grains give us carbohydrates for energy. They also give us B vitamins and iron for healthy blood. Whole grain breads, cereals and bran have a lot of fibre. Fibre and healthy fluids like water, juice and milk help prevent constipation.

- ◆ **I eat 5 or more servings of vegetables and fruit each day.**

**Yes                      No**

Vegetables and fruits give us many vitamins and minerals. They also give us fibre. Be sure to eat dark green and orange vegetables and orange fruits for vitamin A and C.

- ◆ **I eat 2 or more servings of milk products each day.**

**Yes                      No**

Milk products are a great source of calcium. Calcium helps to mend broken bones and keep our bones strong. Try to include a calcium rich food at each meal.

- ◆ **I drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of liquid each day, not counting coffee or tea.**

**Yes                      No**

Liquids help prevent constipation and dehydration.

- ◆ **I try not to have too much salt, alcohol, coffee and tea.**

**Yes                      No**

Most people get more salt than they need. Cut down on salt by eating less salty foods, and using less salt at the table and when you cook. Most adults should not have more than one alcoholic drink a day. Heavy drinking is bad for your health. Coffee and tea keep your body from getting iron and calcium from food. Drink less than 2 mugs or less of coffee and tea each day.

- ◆ **I limit the number of “extra” food choices that I have in a day**

**Yes                      No**

You may receive lots of well wishes in the form of chocolates, candies, etc. Try to limit these food choices while you are healing. They will fill you up and add lots of calories, which may show up as weight gain for you.

Did you answer “**yes**” to all the questions?  
(congratulations!)

If you answered “**no**”, you may need to  
change your diet.

*For more information,  
contact a Registered Dietitian in your area*

*Adapted from Healthy eating for Healthy Aging, Nutrition Resource Centre, OPHA*

## Gait Tips

Here are some simple tips to help improve your gait and reduce the possibility of falling.

- Stand erect with shoulders relaxed
- Let arms swing naturally at side
- Use smooth rolling motion from head to toe
- Look straight ahead and not at your feet
- Take large but comfortable steps
- Wear comfortable low heeled shoes

Wherever possible, walk in familiar surroundings. This will help you:

- Train your body so that you will not need to look down as you walk
- Increase your walking speed
- Practice swinging your arms as you walk

Once comfortable with a walking stride, try walking faster. If you lose your balance, you are walking too fast. Slow down a little and try again.

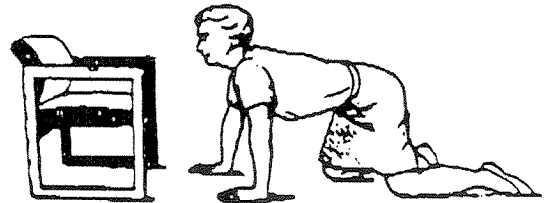
Walking is one of the best activities to maintain healthy muscles, heart and lungs. Start slowly. When weather is a factor, continue your walking program indoors at the mall.

## Getting up from a Fall

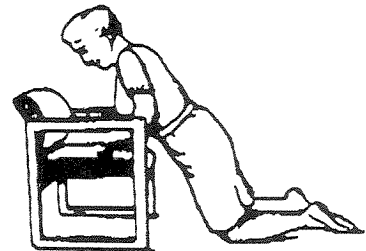
1. Remain calm
2. If you are injured, do not move
3. If you are not in pain or seriously hurt, try the following:
  - Roll to your stomach



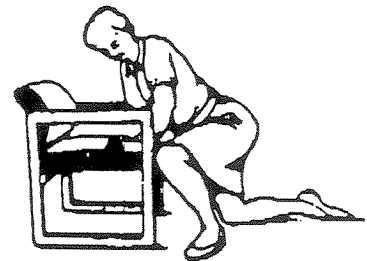
- Crawl to the nearest chair, bench or step



- Put hands on seat of chair, bench or step
- Lean forward



- Push yourself up to standing
- Turn around to sit on chair, bench or step
- Call your family or doctor and explain what happened



## Community Resources

### LOCAL

- **SouthWest Community Care Access Centre (SW CCAC) - (519) 371-2112**  
Please contact the SW CCAC if you feel that you require extra help at home for things such as bathing, dressing, cooking or cleaning, or want information about personal alarm options, meals that can be provided at home, who delivers groceries, who can help you with foot care, etc. They have a lot of information and can help you get the services you need. Please note that some things are funded and other services may have a cost. They can also assist you with getting in contact with professional services such as Dietitians, Social Workers, Therapists, Nurses, etc.
- **Home and Community Support Services of Grey Bruce – (519) 372-2091**  
This service organizes Meals on Wheels, Dining Club, Volunteer Transportation, Friendly Visiting, Home Maintenance Referral and Day Away Programs. Please contact them directly for information and prices.
- **Family Doctor** - This is your primary contact. Contact your doctor's office with any questions or concerns, especially about things such as medication, vision, hearing, depression, chronic conditions, starting an exercise program, etc.
- **Equipment** - Look in the Yellow Pages of the phone book under Home Health Services and Supplies, Medical Supplies or Hospital Equipment and Supplies. In general, stores that sell medical supplies and some pharmacies will rent or sell equipment. You can also contact your local Red Cross, Legion, Odd Fellows, etc. to see if they have a loan cupboard. If you need to purchase equipment, such as a wheelchair or a specialized wheeled walker, there is a government program called the Assistive Devices Program (ADP) that may help with funding. Contact the SW CCAC and ask about the need for a physiotherapy or occupational therapy assessment to complete the paperwork.
- **Home Improvements** - After reading the checklists, you may find that there are small changes that need to be made to your home. Look in the Yellow Pages of the phone book under Home Improvements or Contractors. For major changes, it may be beneficial to have an occupational therapist do a home assessment. Contact the SW CCAC to ask about this.
- **Grey Bruce Public Health Unit - (519) 881-1920 or 1 (800) 821-7714 x 246**  
They can provide you with more information on fall prevention and programs that are available in the community. The Prevention of Falls program has recently received additional funding and the program is expanding. Please call for more information, literature, and to find out what is happening in your area.

- **Owen Sound Community Guide - City Hall (519) 376-1440**

This guide is published annually by Owen Sound's Community Services Department in conjunction with the Sun Times. The guide has contact information for a wide variety of services, clubs and organizations in the Owen Sound area. Ask for the Community Services Department to request the current issue.

## **OTHER CONTACTS**

- Alcoholics Anonymous 1 800 668-3348  
[www.alcoholics-anonymous.org](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org)
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health 1 800 463-6273  
[www.camh.net](http://www.camh.net)
- Allergy/Asthma Information Association 1 800 611-7011  
[www.calgaryallergy.ca/aaia](http://www.calgaryallergy.ca/aaia)
- Alzheimer Society of Canada 1 800 616-8816  
[www.alzheimer.ca](http://www.alzheimer.ca)
- Arthritis Society 1 800 321-1433  
[www.arthritis.ca](http://www.arthritis.ca)
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 1 800 668-2642  
[www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca)
- Canadian Cancer Society 1 800 268-8874  
[www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)
- Cancer Information Service 1 888 939-3333  
[www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca) (click on Cancer Information Service)
- Ontario Cancer Treatment and Research Foundation (416) 971-9800  
[www.cancercare.on.ca](http://www.cancercare.on.ca)
- Canadian Continence Society 1 800 265-9575  
[www.sfcs.org.sg/continet](http://www.sfcs.org.sg/continet)
- Canadian Diabetes Association 1 800 226-8464  
[www.diabetes.ca](http://www.diabetes.ca)
- Canadian Hard of Hearing Association 1 800 263-8068  
[www.chha.ca](http://www.chha.ca)
- Canadian Hearing Society (705) 737-3190 - (Barrie)  
[www.chs.ca](http://www.chs.ca)

- Canadian Mental Health Association 1 800 875-6213  
[www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)
- Canadian National Institution for the Blind 1 800 563-2642  
[www.cnib.ca](http://www.cnib.ca)
- College of Optometrists of Ontario 1 888 825-2554  
[www.collegeoptom.on.ca](http://www.collegeoptom.on.ca)
- Health Canada 1 800 622-6232  
[www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)
- Hospice Associations of Ontario (Grief Counselling) 1 800 349-3111  
[www.hospice.on.ca](http://www.hospice.on.ca)
- Huntington Society of Canada 1 800 998-7398  
[www.hsc-ca.org](http://www.hsc-ca.org)
- Multiple Sclerosis Society 1 800 268-7582  
[www.mssociety.ca](http://www.mssociety.ca)
- Muscular Dystrophy Association of Canada 1 800 567-2873  
[www.mdac.ca](http://www.mdac.ca)
- Canadian Assembly of Narcotics Anonymous 1 877 563-2349  
[www.na.org](http://www.na.org) (Georgian Heartland Area)
- Ontario Lung Association 1 800 972-2636  
[www.on.lung.ca](http://www.on.lung.ca)
- Ontario Pharmacists' Association 1 877 341-0788  
[www.opatoday.com](http://www.opatoday.com)
- Osteoporosis Society of Canada 1 800 463-6842  
[www.osteoporosis.ca](http://www.osteoporosis.ca)
- Parkinson Society Canada 1 800 565-3000  
[www.parkinson.ca](http://www.parkinson.ca)
- Schizophrenia Society of Ontario 1 800 449-6367  
[www.schizophrenia.on.ca](http://www.schizophrenia.on.ca)
- Smokers' Help Line 1 877 513-5333
- Veterans Affairs 1 800 387-0930  
[www.vac-acc.gc.ca](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca)