

# SENIORS FALL PREVENTION

## Are you at risk of falling?

Fill out **this quick survey in order** to check if you are at risk of falling. If needed, talk it over to your doctor or another healthcare professional.

Falls can result from a variety of causes: tripping over a rug, an electrical cord or an uneven surface such as a sidewalk, slipping on a wet or icy surface, falling again while trying to get up, tumbling down the stairs or missing a stair.

Common falls related to your activities or just moving around can be prevented!

- They can be prevented by making adjustments in your home, adopting good habits and staying active.
- Also, you should never hesitate to ask for help with certain activities like shopping, housework or many other things.

## Why is falling dangerous?

For many seniors, falling can trigger a transition to another, sometimes less desirable stage of life.

### A fall can :

- Lead to a loss of independence or mobility,
- Cause a fracture
- Lead to institutionalization
- Sometimes even lead to death

## General data on falling

- Summary
- Death toll
- Main types of falling
- Hospitalization rate

**Each year, a 1/3 of elderly people aged 65 and over fall. As we get older, consequences can become more and more important.**

Among people falling, 4/10 will get hospitalized.

In 2021, around 6800 elderly people in Montreal were hospitalized after falling, and approximately 275 died.

# Symptoms

Signs of an injury can appear immediately after falling, or in the following 24 to 48 hours.

- Blow to the head
- Loss of consciousness
- Blue or black colored skin under the eyes
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Fatigue, drowsiness
- Loss of balance
- Headache
- Double vision
- Severe or persistent body aches
- Bleeding

**If you have one or many of these symptoms, call 811.**

If you are using blood thinner medications (anticoagulant), call 811 immediately after a fall.

# Protection and prevention

## Caution

**In the event of a fall, call 811 immediately.**

Watch for symptoms that can occur a few days after a fall, even if they don't seem serious. For example, you could have muscle pain or a headache.

Don't hesitate to go see a doctor or health professional.

How to choose shoes to prevent falls

Here are a few recommendations to choose the right shoes to prevent falling. It's important to read it when you go to buy shoes.

### Heel:

- The heel cup (shoe counter) is deep enough to support the foot and prevent heel slipping.
- The heel should be no more than 3/8 inch (1 cm) high.
- The heel is wide and flat to provide better stability.

### Sole:

- For better stability, the midsole shouldn't be thicker than 1 inch (2.54 cm).
- The outsole should provide good grip, without sticking carpets.

### Toe:

- The toe should be rounded and wide enough to allow toes to move.
- The shoe length shouldn't be more than 1/4 inch (0.64 cm) longer than the longest toe.

### Laces:

- For ultimate comfort and room for foot swelling, several adjustments exist: velcro fastening, elastic laces or lateral elastic bands.

### **Read the flyer on choosing the right shoes to prevent falls (PDF)**

Use ice grippers in winter

Grippers are very useful to increase safety and stability when walking outdoors on hard snow and on ice.

Grippers must never be used indoors.

It is recommended to sit down in a place with a doormat when putting them on and taking them off.

You can buy grippers in most pharmacies and large stores.

Some boots have built-in ice grippers. They are more expensive but also more practical.

For more information:

- **Summary on boots, ice grippers, and walking poles (PDF)**  
Safety tips for winter walking
- Wear boots with anti-slip soles or grippers and remove grippers once inside
- Watch your step
- Take small steps, slightly dragging your feet
- Walk with your feet apart in a V shape
- Bent slightly forward while walking
- Keep your hands free and out of your pockets
- Use a backpack to carry your personal effects or purchases
- Go slowly

### **For more information**

- **Preventing falls: learn how to walk like a penguin**

Using walking sticks in the city

When used properly, walking poles increase stability and improve posture.

They provide extra points of contact with the ground and reduce the impact on knees and low back.

Also, walking poles also improve endurance and walking speed.

How to use them

- Adjust the height so that your elbows are at a 90° angle when you hold the poles out in front of you.

- Choose the right tip for the type of terrain and season (e.g., ice picks in the winter).
- Walk with a natural arm swing.

You can buy walking poles in sport and outdoor equipment stores.

For more information:

- **Summary on boots, ice grippers, and walking poles (PDF)**

**Secure your home**

- Always have your phone or a whistle within reach to draw attention and get help if you fall
- Declutter hallways and staircases
- Fix carpets on the ground or remove them
- All rooms in your home should be well lighted, and make sure to use night lights
- Everyday objects should be within reach to avoid climbing
- Fully close drawers and cabinets
- Immediately mop any liquid that fall on the ground
- Use nonslip bath mats inside and outside your bathtub or shower.

**Knowing your medications**

Taking medications can be a risk factor for falls.

Most medications can have side effects; psychotropic drugs or medications to treat cardiovascular diseases can especially affect balance. These medications can provoke falls because they often make you feel sleepy or dizzy. Don't hesitate to talk to a doctor, pharmacist or nurse about it.

**It's important not to stop taking your medications without first talking to a doctor, nurse or pharmacist. Stopping without consulting puts you at risk of having withdrawal symptoms, falling or having other side effects.**

**Ask your pharmacist or doctor the following questions:**

- What is each of these medications used for?
- What are the known side effects of my medications?
- What should I do if I have side effects?
- What should I do if I forget to take a dose?
- What are the contraindications of drinking alcohol, other drinks or food.

**Act now to know more about the medications you take.**

- Be aware that psychotropic drugs, which help you relax, sleep or improve your mood, can increase your risk of falling.
- Always follow the doses of the medications.
- Talk to your pharmacist, who is familiar with your file and can give you information specific to your medications.

- Keep a current medication list at home and in your wallet.
- Don't share prescription medications.
- Don't take medications that are past date and always bring them back to a pharmacy.

**For more information:**

- Read the in information tool on knowing your medications (PDF)

- [Avantage.ca](http://Avantage.ca)

Get your vision checked

As we get older, it's important to see an optometrist each year.

**The Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec (RAMQ) covers the costs of one eye exam a year performed by an optometrist, for people aged 65 years and over. If you already see an ophthalmologist, he or she can perform your annual exam. No need to wait... it's free!**

Vision is very important when you move around, orient yourself in your physical space and to maintain your posture. Changes to your vision can increase your risks of falling and hurting yourself.

**Over time,**

- Over time, the eyes take more time to adapt to changes in light;
- it's harder to discern objects, especially at night;
- depth perception can change;
- you may develop conditions such as cataracts, glaucoma or macular degeneration

**Take action now to improve and maintain eye health**

- Keep all rooms in your home well lit and at similar intensity.
- Add motion sensor lights or nightlights in hallways and bathrooms.
- Wear glasses that protect your eyes from sunrays, even in winter.
- Mark the edge of your stairs with antislip tape.

**If you wear bifocals or progressive glasses...**

- you may have difficulty going up or down the stairs;
- be careful when you're near the edge of the sidewalk.

It's hard to see the ground well with those types of glasses. Talk to an optometrist.

**For more information:**

- Read the flyer on checking your vision (PDF)

How to get up safely after a fall

**1. Roll onto your stomach**

- Look around for a stable sturdy piece of furniture or object nearby (e.g., bench, table, bed, chair, staircase, toilet, sofa, fire hydrant, etc.)
- Bend one knee and stretch out your arms
- Roll onto your side
- Turn onto your stomach

**2. Get on your hands and knees**

- Push your upper body up by pressing your forearms into the floor

- Bend your knees as you lift your upper body and buttocks
- Get on your hands and knees, then crawl to the sturdy object
- Place your hands on the sturdy object

### **3. Get up**

- Lift a knee and put your foot flat on the floor
  - Lift a knee and put your foot flat on the floor
- OR-
- Move closer to the sturdy object
  - Lift both knees at the same time, as you support yourself on the sturdy object

### **4. Sit down, and assess how you feel**

- As you support yourself on the sturdy object, turn your body
- Control your movements as you lower yourself to sit on the chair

### **For more information and illustrations:**

- [How to get up safely after a fall \(PDF\)](#)

#### **Help seniors avoid falling**

##### **Citizens and neighbors**

- Nurture good relations with your neighbors and look out for elderly people around you
- Keep sidewalks and walkways free of large objects barring the way, such as tree branches, recycle bins, trashcans, etc.
- Help elderly neighbors to take out the trash, shovel snow or move their groceries.
- Alert your borough councillor if you see safety risks or if you have ideas to make urban improvements for seniors.
- Call 311 to signal missed or uncleared areas.

##### **Landlords and merchants**

Facilitate safe walking by adapting commercial and living environments for seniors. For example:

- Keep entryways free of bulky objects
- Install a bench near entrances
- Make sure that in any season, floors and exterior surfaces are not slippery

##### **Community organizers and social workers**

- Propose activities for seniors to stay active and engaged in their communities (e.g., physical activities, social events, workshops, etc.)
- Provide support services (e.g., counseling, meals on wheels, etc.)
- Participate in health prevention and promotion campaigns (social isolation, elder abuse, fall prevention, etc.)

##### **Local government and elected officials**

- Reach out to senior to learn more about their needs in urban settings
- Ensure seniors in your communities have safe access to paratransit
- Adapt and tend walkways and public spaces for seniors' safety (urban development, street maintenance)
- Offer physical activities programs that are available and adapted for all age

#### **Other habits to adopt**

- Exercise regularly

- Sleep more
- Eat well
- Check if your medication causes dizziness
- Adjust lighting at home
- Plan your daily trips

## Risk factors

Several factors can increase the risk of falling and injuring yourself.

### Personal risk factors

- Decreased balance
- Weaker bones and muscles
- Problems with vision or hearing
- Sedentary lifestyle ( limited physical activity)
- Consequences of taking certain medications

### Environmental risk factors

#### At home:

- Slippery surfaces
- Lack of lighting
- Obstacles that will cause tripping

#### Fall:

- Surfaces covered with slippery dead leaves
- Winter : Take the necessary precautions when walking in winter
- Surfaces with snow covering ice
- Surfaces with black ice
- Freezing rain
- Snow accumulation

## Help and Resources

### Information tools

- What you need to know about falling
- Check if you're at risk of falling
- How to choose shoes to prevent falls
- How to get up on your own after a fall
- Wear proper footwear and use the right accessories to get around safely in winter
- Knowing your medications
- Get your vision checked
- Take the necessary precautions when walking in winter
- Program and promotional activities

## Programs and workshops

- **STAND UP! Program**, proven effective, STAND UP! is part of a continuum of services designed to prevent falls and fractures among independent seniors living at home.
- [Awareness workshop on falls prevention](#), FADOQ-Montréal for people over 50 years of age and their caregiver (in French only).
- [Walk to the Future](#), a falls prevention program to meet the needs of a remote and virtual clientele, CNFS-University of Ottawa component (in French only)
- [You CAN prevent falls!](#), Public Health Agency of Canada
- **Le GO pour bouger!**, physical activity for seniors (content available in English and 9 other languages)
- [Move50+](#)

## Programs offered in Montreal's health services

- [CIUSSS de l'Est-de-l'Île-de-Montréal](#)
- [CIUSSS de l'Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal](#)
- [CIUSSS du Centre-Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal](#)
- [CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal](#)
- [CIUSSS du Nord-de-l'Île-de-Montréal](#)
- [Clinique communautaire de Pointe-Saint-Charles](#) | 514 937-9251, poste 7268