



How to reduce your fall risk at home

Disclaimer

This patient education resource is not medical advice. It shares common health facts, advice and tips. Some of the information provided in this resource may not apply to you. Please talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care team member to see if this information will work for you. They can also answer any questions or concerns that you might have.

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The facts about falls

Falls are the leading cause of injury among older adults in Canada:

- **20-30% experience at least one fall each year**
- **95% of all hip fractures are due to a fall**
- **50% of all falls causing hospitalization happen at home**

Falls can result in chronic pain, reduced mobility, loss of independence and even death.



Protect yourself from falls

Anyone can fall. But as we age, our risk of falling becomes greater. That's the bad news. The good news is that falls can be prevented. The first step to avoiding falls is to understand what causes them. For example, poor balance, decreased muscle and bone strength, reduced vision or hearing, and unsafe conditions in and around your home can increase your chance of falling. Staying safe and on your feet is a matter of taking some steps to protect yourself.

You can prevent falls by making the needed adjustments to your home and lifestyle, and by making sure you eat well, stay fit, and use whatever devices will help your daily life while keeping you safe. Your independence and well-being are at stake.

Take action!

CHECKLIST

Identify and remove hazards with this checklist: Your home

Exterior

- Keep front steps and walkway in good repair and free of snow, ice and leaves.
- Keep front entrance well lit.
- Put garden tools such as hoses and rakes away when not using them.

Living room and bedroom

- Reduce clutter! Get rid of loose wires and cords as well as any other obstacles.
- Consider using a cordless phone to avoid rushing to answer.
- Have good lighting throughout the house and install night lights.
- Make sure the path is clear between the bedroom and bathroom.
- Get rid of scatter mats or make sure they are non-slip.
- Get out of your bed or chair slowly; moving suddenly can make you dizzy.

Kitchen

- Store kitchen supplies and pots and pans in easy-to-reach locations.
- Store heavy items in lower cupboards.
- Always wipe up any spills immediately to prevent slipping.
- If you use floor wax, use the non-skid kind.



Stairs

- Make sure your stairs are well lit.
- Install solid handrails on both sides of the stairway.
- Remove your reading glasses when you go up and down the stairs.
- Never rush up or down the stairs. It's a major cause of falls.

Bathroom

- Ensure you have non-slip surfaces for the tub and shower.
- Install well-anchored grab bars by the toilet and bath to help you sit and stand.
- Use a raised toilet seat, and a bath seat in the shower, if you need them.
- Keep the floor clear of water or obstacles.

Your health



Manage your health with regular check-ups:

| | |
|--------------------------|------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Medical |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Vision |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Hearing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Medication |

Eat well to stay strong

- Enjoy a variety of nutritious foods. Include milk and alternatives, meat and alternatives, grains, as well as lots of vegetables and fruit.
- Don't skip meals. It can cause weakness and dizziness.
- Drink water regularly to prevent dehydration and dizziness.
- Eat at least three servings of calcium rich food daily and talk to your health care provider about taking a vitamin D supplement to keep your bones strong.



Keep fit and improve your balance

- Engage in 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every week. It is your best defence against falls.
- Add strength and balance activities like lifting weights and Tai Chi, at least two days per week.
- Consult your doctor before you start an exercise program.



Use medication wisely

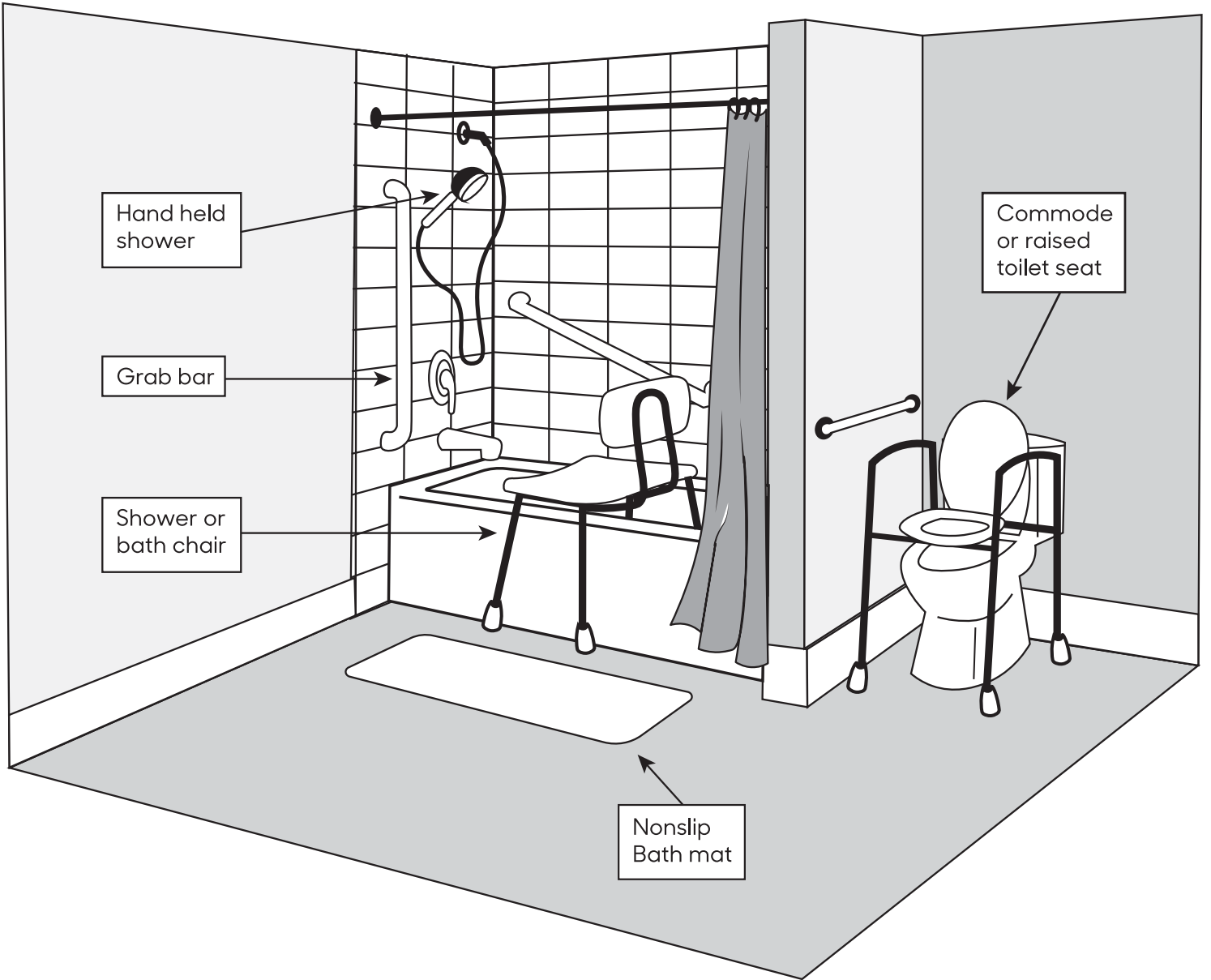
- Have a medication review every year.
- Keep an up-to-date list.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist about possible side effects of prescription, over-the-counter or natural health products.
- Read directions carefully so you're aware of potential reactions with other medications.
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you experience drowsiness, dizziness, unsteadiness, or blurred vision.
- Don't mix alcohol with medications. Alone or in combination with drugs, alcohol can cause falls.

Assistive devices

Devices such as canes, grab bars, handrails, and walkers can really help prevent falls and reduce the risk of injuries. Individuals with balance and mobility problems are encouraged to use assistive devices for daily activities.

Assistive devices can make your bathroom safer:

- Use a non-slip bathmat on your bathroom floor and in your tub or shower.
- Install grab bars in the tub area.
- If bathing is difficult, consider buying a bath seat and a handheld shower head or getting help with bathing.
- If sitting on or getting up from the toilet is difficult, consider getting a raised toilet seat and/or installing a grab bar.



Four-wheeled walker

What is it? A four-wheeled walker provides walking support. It has a lightweight frame and wheels that can go in any direction. It also has a seat for short rests.

How do I know if it fits?

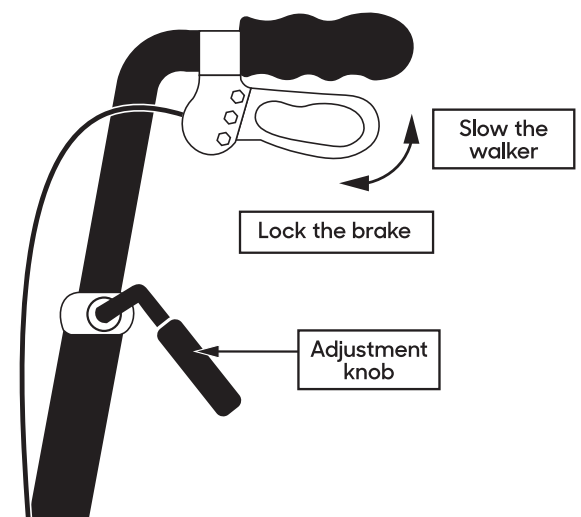
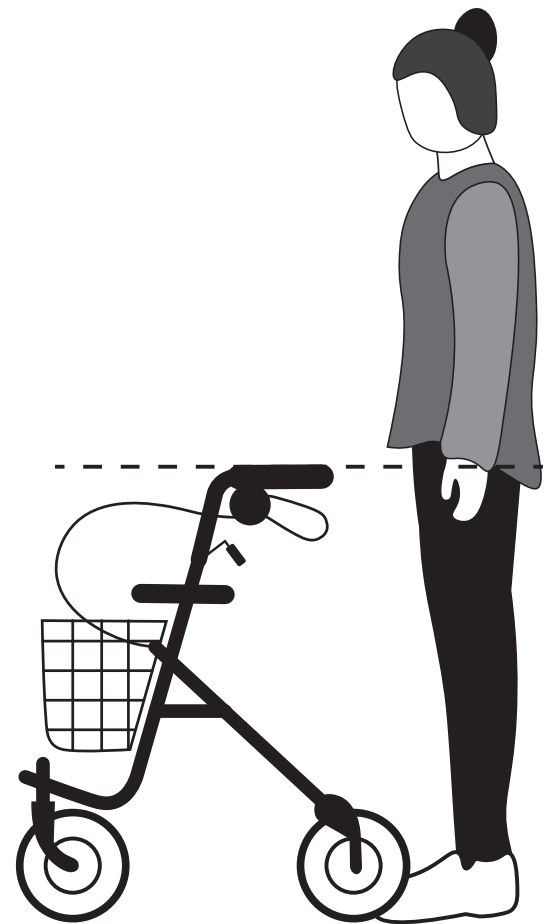
- Stand tall with your shoes on. Relax your arms and let them hang loosely at your sides.
- The top of the handle should be at the crease of your wrist.

How do I adjust its height?

- For most models, loosen the knobs on the outside of the handles and move the handles up or down. Remember to re-tighten the knobs. Vendors of walkers can also help you adjust it.
- The seat height is not adjustable. When you sit in the seat, the front part of your feet should touch the ground. If the seat is too low or too high, you may need a different walker.

How do I use it?

- Lean on the walker and allow it to roll forward with control as you step forward in the centre of the walker.
- To slow the walker down, squeeze or pull up on the handbrake.
- Always lock the handbrakes of the walker before sitting or standing up.
 - » To lock the handbrake, push down on it.
 - » To release the handbrake, carefully squeeze the brake handles again.



How do I sit on the seat?

1. Place the walker against something sturdy like a wall.
 2. Lock the brakes.
 3. To sit on the walker seat:
 - Turn around and back up until you feel the seat touch the back of your legs.
 - Reach back and place your hands on the handles of the walker.
 - Sit down slowly and carefully.
- Warning: the walker is not meant to be used as a wheelchair. Do not move the walker while sitting on it.

Cane

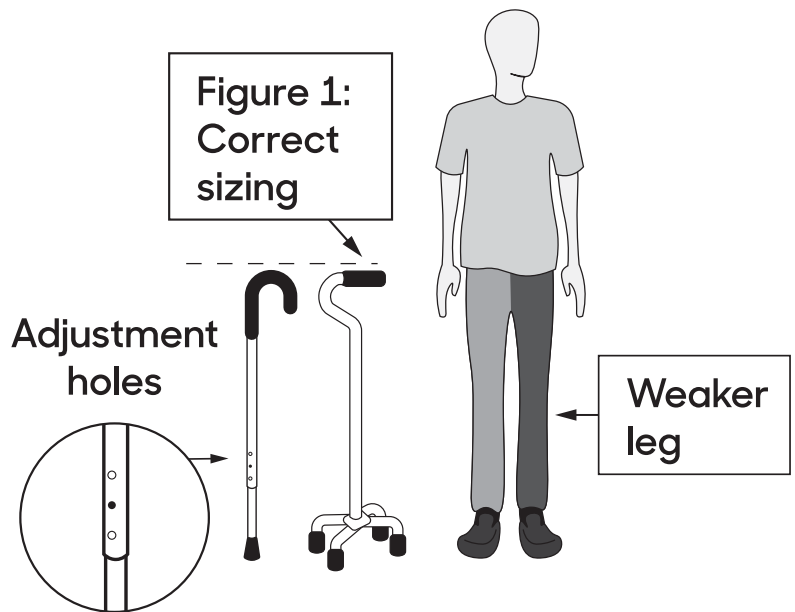
A cane provides walking support. It has two parts: a long shaft and a handle.

How do I adjust a cane?

- Stand tall with your shoes on. Relax your arms and let them hang loosely at your sides.
- The top of the cane should be at the crease of your wrist.

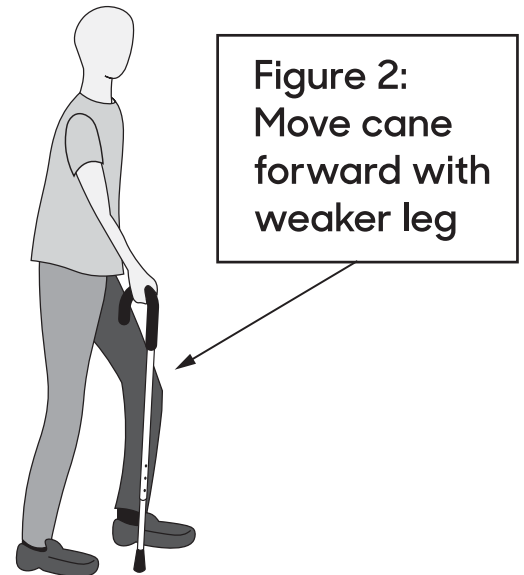
How do I adjust its height?

1. A cane has a series of holes along the shaft with a spring button. Push the spring button in and lengthen (by pulling) or shorten (by pushing) the shaft of the cane to the length you want.
2. Tighten the collar near the base of the cane (if the cane has one) to secure it.



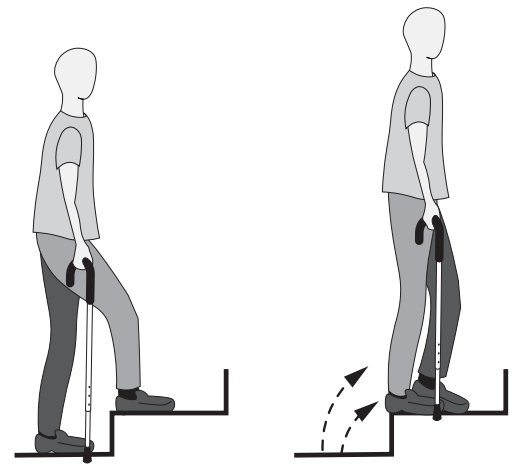
How do I use it on flat ground?

1. Hold the cane on your strongest side (in your dominant hand). But if your "bad" leg (weak or painful), is on your dominant side, hold the cane in your other hand instead.
2. Keep your elbow close to your body.
3. Move the cane and the opposite leg forward together.
4. Walk as normally as possible. Keep your steps even. Walk slowly until you feel more confident.



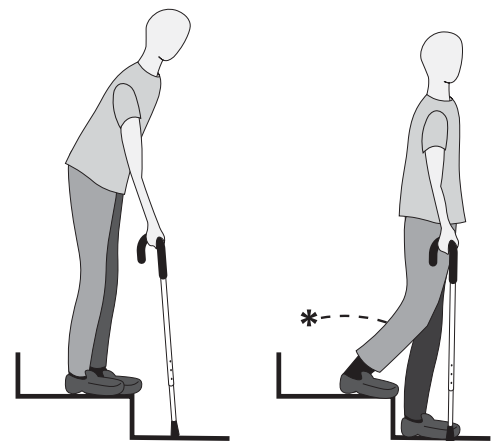
How do I walk with a cane up stairs?

1. Stand close to the step.
2. Step up with your stronger leg. Make sure your foot is securely on the first step.
3. Lean forward while stepping up to the same step with your weaker leg and the cane.



How do I walk with a cane down stairs?

1. Stay standing up tall. Try not to bend forward very much.
2. Put the cane on the lower step, and then step down with the weaker leg.
3. Step down on the same step with the stronger leg.



Safety Aids

- Aids to daily living can keep you safe and active.
- Wear your glasses and hearing aids.
- Consider using a walker or cane and make sure that it is the correct height.
- Wear well-fitted shoes or slippers with closed, low heels and non-slip soles.
- Find out about other gadgets that make your life safer: reachers, ice grippers, hip protectors, etc.
- Use them!



If you fall...

- Try to land on your buttocks to prevent more serious injuries.
- Don't rush to get up. Make sure you are not injured before trying to get up or letting others help you get up.
- Don't let the fear of falling again prevent you from being active. Inactivity creates an even greater risk of falling.
- Report falls to your health care provider to determine the cause and prevent another fall.

For more information:

To learn more about falls and how to prevent them, visit the following websites:

- **Ottawa Public Health**
- [Ottawa Public Health Prevent Falls](#)
- **Public Health Agency of Canada**
- [Public Health Agency of Canada - Aging - Seniors](#)
- **Regional Geriatric Program of Eastern Ontario**
- [RGPEO - Stop Falls](#)

Where do I go if I have questions or need help

Ask your family doctor, nurse, or other healthcare team member any questions that you might have.

Do you have any feedback about this education resource?

Is it welcoming and respectful of your background, culture, and identity? Your opinion is important to us. Please fill out this [survey](#) or contact the Patient Education team at patienteducation@toh.ca.



Do you need this information in a different format?

Please tell a member of your health care team who can refer to the Accessibility team's resources on MyHospital. This resource is available in English and French.

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<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/aging-seniors/publications/publications-general-public/you-prevent-falls.html>



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