

# Preventing falls at home



You may be at risk of falling. This fact sheet explains how to prevent falls, what to do if they happen, and where to get help to stay in shape.

## Why take precautions?

Falls can be prevented with simple actions. The following tips will help you:

- walk safely, especially after a hospital stay
- prevent falls and their sometimes serious consequences (e.g. hip fracture, back pain)
- stay healthy and independent

## Am I at risk of falling?

To find out whether you're at risk of falling, answer the questions in Appendix 1 on page 4. They will help you assess your risks.

## How can I prevent falls at home?

### MEDICAL CONSULTATION

- > See your doctor regularly. Contact your doctor if you have new symptoms related to your treatments or if you're not feeling like your usual self.
- > Take your medications as prescribed.
- > Tell your doctor or your pharmacist if:
  - you're having trouble following their advice
  - you're feeling confused, tired, or dizzy
  - you feel weak
  - you sometimes lose your balance



Have your vision and hearing checked regularly. If you feel they are getting worse, make an appointment soon with an optometrist or an audiologist. Being able to see and hear clearly what is around you helps to prevent falls.



## EQUIPMENT

- > Always wear your glasses and hearing aids.
- > Wear closed shoes, in the right size, and with non-skid soles.
- > Use an appropriate technical aid to get around, such as a cane, a walker or a wheelchair.

## DIET

- > To maintain good physical health, you should:

- eat a varied diet
- drink enough liquid, about 1.5 litres per day, unless otherwise advised by your doctor
- not skip meals
- stop drinking alcohol, or drink less



## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Do at least 30 minutes of physical activity 5 times a week. This will help to keep your muscles healthy and maintain your balance, so you're less likely to fall.



### ATTENTION

When you've been lying down or sitting for a long time, take your time getting up. Don't change your position if you're feeling dizzy.

## AT HOME

- > Don't wax your floors. This will make them slippery.
- > If any liquid spills on the floor, wipe it up at once.
- > Remove any objects that could cause you to fall (electric wires, rugs, etc.). If you need to keep any, secure them to the floor with tape. If necessary, ask for help to do this safely.
- > Clear your front walkway. Remove any snow and weeds in the path leading to your door.

- > Keep items you use often within easy reach.
- > Place your phones where you can reach them if you fall.
- > Add light sources to your home if it's not bright enough.
- > Install handrails and non-slip strips on stairs. Put brightly coloured tape on the first and last steps.
- > Install grab bars and a nightlight in the bathroom. If necessary, install a raised toilet seat.



- > Put a seat and non-slip mat in the bath or shower. Install a detachable shower head that you can hold in your hands.

## What should I do if I fall?

It's important to stay calm.

If you **CAN** get up, follow the steps described in Appendix 2, page 5.

If you **CANNOT** get up, follow the steps described in Appendix 3, page 8.

## What should I do after a fall?

It's a good idea to check to see if you've been injured, then take action to prevent any more falls. Here's how:

- > See a doctor right away if you have any of the following signs:
  - You lost consciousness just before or just after falling

- You're injured or you have a pain that doesn't go away
- Your vision is impaired
- You don't feel like your usual self (dizzy, tired, weak, nauseous, etc.)
- > At your visits with health professionals, tell them you have fallen, even if you feel fine.
- > To avoid falling again, ask yourself:
  - Why did I fall? What happened?
  - How can I avoid another fall?



After a fall, it's normal to be afraid of falling again. Don't hesitate to talk about it with the doctors or other professionals looking after your health. They can reassure you.

## Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

If you have questions, ask your doctor or a member of your care team. Depending on your needs, you could also see a physiotherapist or occupational therapist.

If you come to the clinic, the team can apply to your CLSC for help on your behalf. For example, you can get help to make your home safer. Don't hesitate to talk to them about it.

If you fall, call **9-1-1**.



*The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.*



## USEFUL RESOURCES

**Medical alert service:** This service provides quick access to help, 24 hours a day, using a portable call button. The CHUM Foundation has a partner for affordable rates. Ask your care team about this.

**STAND UP! Program.** This program provides adapted exercises and information on fall prevention. It is offered to independent adults aged 65 and over living at home. Register through the CLSC or online.

> [santemontreal.qc.ca](http://santemontreal.qc.ca)

Click on English → Public → Support and services → Fall prevention: STAND UP!

**Program Le GO pour bouger!:** Physical activity program created and adapted for seniors.

> [santemontreal.qc.ca](http://santemontreal.qc.ca)

Click on English → Public → Advice and Prevention → Physical activity for seniors

**Your neighbourhood CLSC:** Contact them to find out about all the services available to people at risk of falling.

**L'Appui pour les proches aidants (Caregiver support).** Line support for caregivers of seniors:

> **1 855 852-7784**

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our website

[chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante](http://chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante)

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal  
**chumontreal.qc.ca**

## APPENDIX 1: AM I AT RISK OF FALLING?

Check all the statements that apply to you.

- I have fallen in the past year
- I use (or have been advised by a health professional to use) a cane or walker to get around
- Sometimes I lose my balance when walking
- Sometimes I need to lean on something to get up or move around
- I'm afraid of falling
- I have trouble stepping up onto the sidewalk
- I often hurry to get to a bathroom
- I have lost sensation in my feet
- I take medication to improve my sleep or my mood

If you checked **even just one** of the statements above, you're at risk of falling. Discuss it with your care team or your family doctor.



To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal  
[chumontreal.qc.ca](http://chumontreal.qc.ca)

If you **CAN** get yourself up after a fall, follow these steps, taking all the time you need.



- 1** Start by catching your breath, then check for injuries. If you didn't fall on your stomach, roll over onto your side and then onto your stomach.



- 2** Support yourself on one side using your elbow. Then, while keeping that support, raise yourself up on the other side with one hand.



- 3** Get up on all fours. If you can't support yourself with your hands, use your elbows.



**4** Staying on all fours, move towards a chair or other stable object.



**5** Get up on your knees with both hands on the chair.



**6** Put the foot of your strongest leg flat on the floor while holding the chair.



7 Stand up while leaning on the chair.

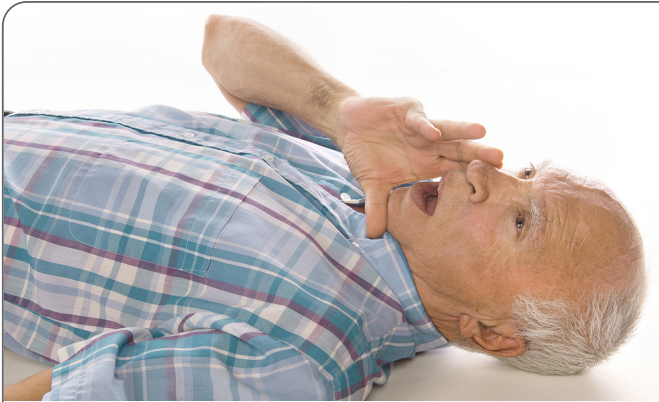


8 With your hands still on the chair, turn around.



9 Sit down.

### If you CANNOT get up after a fall.



#### 1 Signal that you need help.

Yell if you think someone can hear you.



If you have a medical alert call button or a phone handy, use it. Call a loved one or dial **9-1-1**. Otherwise, try to crawl towards a phone or a place where you can be heard.



Make noise with an object (such as your cane) to attract attention.



#### 2 Wait for help in a comfortable position.

If possible, put a pillow under your head. Cover yourself with a piece of clothing or a blanket to keep warm.

Move your arms and legs from time to time to avoid stiffness.