

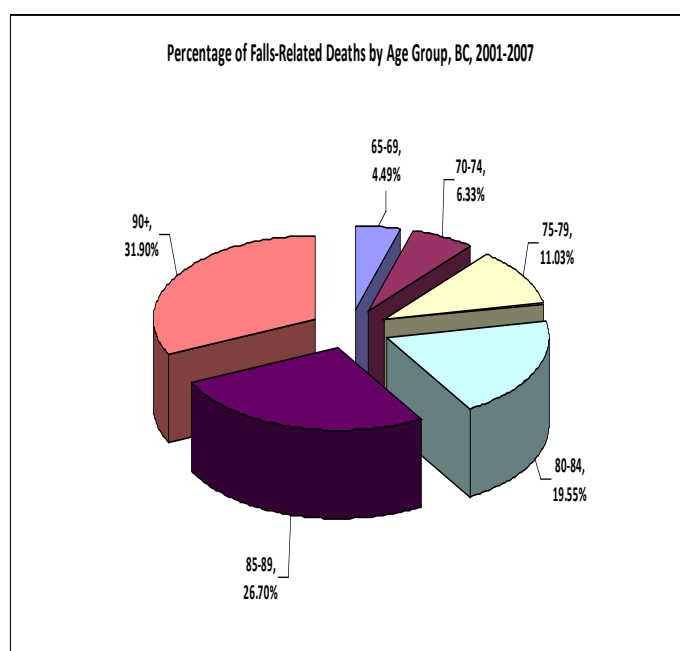
PREVENTING FALLS IN THE ELDERLY



Did you know....?

- Approximately 280 people aged 65+ die each year in BC, due to a fall
- The cause of death tends to be falls on the same level, yet the 65-74-year old seniors are being hospitalized due to falls on or from stairs, steps or ladders
- Approximately 10,625 people aged 65+ are hospitalized each year in BC, due to a fall
- One-third of people aged 65 years and over typically fall once or more per year
- It is estimated that over 225,000 BC seniors will experience at least one fall in 2010/11
- Falls are the most common cause of injury and the 6th leading cause of death for seniors
- Approximately 95% of hip fractures are due to a fall
- Most falls occur in seniors' homes, while doing usual daily activities

Who is dying?



As shown above, while it is those aged 85+ who die from a fall (58.6%), it is the 80-84 year old age group who account for the greatest percentage of hospitalizations (23%)

What contributes to seniors' falls?

- *Physical risk factors include:* chronic illnesses or conditions; multiple medications; infections; age related sensory changes; and mobility problems, including slower reflexes and muscle weakness
- *Indoor risks include:* poorly lit stairs, ramps or doorways; improperly designed or maintained stairways; lack of, or incorrectly installed, grab bars in bathrooms; slippery floors, throw rugs, loose carpets; or cluttered walking surfaces
- *Outdoor risks include:* uneven or cracked sidewalks or stairs; poor lighting, either not enough or too much glare; snow, ice, or wet leaves; and objects on sidewalks or walkways such as bicycle racks or garbage cans
- *Risky behaviours include:* wearing loose fitting or worn out shoes; consuming alcohol to the point of impaired judgement and/ or balance; trying to get objects that are out of reach rather than asking for assistance; and not using assistive devices (walkers, canes, etc.) when needed or using them incorrectly
- *Social and economic risks include:* living alone without a way to access help; lack of social networks; insufficient income for safe living quarters or nutritional food; or lack of access or knowledge on how to acquire needed health care services or health promotion information

Tips for lowering your risk of falling at home

- Ensure that your stairways and living areas are in good repair; install grab bars in the bathroom and handrails for all stairways
- Remove clutter, electrical cords and loose rugs from stairs and walkways
- In your kitchen, place frequently used items in an easy-to-reach location, with heavy items in lower cupboards
- Always wipe up any spills immediately to avoid slipping
- In your bedroom, be sure to have a clear path from your bed to the bathroom; install night lights in your hallway and bathroom
- In the bathroom, be sure to use a rubber bath/shower mat, or a non-slip surface in your tub or shower
- At the entrance to your home, keep the front steps and walkway in good repair and free of snow, ice and leaves; keep your front entrance well lit and consider installing a motion-sensitive light

What can I personally do to decrease my risk of falling?

- Maintain an active and healthy lifestyle through appropriate exercise, good nutrition, regular physical check-ups, and eye and ear exams
- If you have difficulty with your mobility outside the home, ask your physiotherapist for an in-home exercise program to fit your needs
- For those who are active outside the home, exercises to promote balance, strength and endurance are best for reducing falls
- Avoid rushing or carrying too much
- Consult a physiotherapist on the appropriate use of mobility aids and safety devices, such as a cane with spiked ends or shoes with ice grips
- Wear footwear that provides good support, with soles that have non-slip treads and are not too thick
- Have your family doctor or pharmacist do a regular review of your medications
- Be socially active by joining a community group and getting together with friends or family



Useful Resources

- Your family physician, physiotherapist, pharmacist or other healthcare provider
- The brochure “Seniors’ Falls Can Be Prevented”, available at www.injuryresearch.bc.ca or by calling 604-875-3776
- The BC Health and Seniors’ Information Line: 1-800-465-4911
- BC Injury Research and Prevention Unit (www.injuryresearch.bc.ca)
- Centre of Excellence on Mobility, Fall Prevention and Injury in Aging (www.hiphealth.ca/CEMFIA)
- Public Health Agency of Canada (<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/publications/index-eng.php>)