



# Healthy Steps

*Your guide to falls prevention and home safety*



United Way  
Toronto

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# Are you at risk for a fall?

*The best way to keep yourself safe and independent in your home is to know where the risks are.*

## **Risks include:**

- Having a medical condition such as arthritis, osteoporosis, poor balance or impaired vision or hearing.
- Using four or more medications daily.
- Poor nutrition due to loss of appetite, difficulty getting out to shop or an unbalanced diet.
- Unsafe home conditions such as clutter, poorly lit hallways, loose carpets and rugs, and general disrepair.
- Chronic foot problems or poorly fitting shoes or slippers.
- A lack of physical activity or exercise.
- Unsafe outdoor areas caused by snow, ice or lack of maintenance.
- Living alone without help or support.
- Lack of mobility aids such as non-slip tub/shower surfaces, grab bars, bath seats or lower kitchen cabinets.
- Lack of a personal care plan to deal with injuries resulting from a fall.

# Healthy steps for fall prevention

## General safety

- Wear footwear with non-slip soles at all times, inside and outside.
- Be mindful of clothing with low or dangling fringes or hems that can cause tripping.
- Wear clothing that doesn't interfere with your mobility.
- Sit down rather than stand on one leg when dressing.
- Rise slowly. Do ankle pumps (alternating between toes pointing up and then down) before standing if you have been sitting for a while.
- Use chairs with armrests to assist you in rising.
- Stand up, stop and get balanced before you start walking.
- Always walk slowly and upright. Avoid rushing or hasty movements.
- Know where pets are before getting up.
- Turn lights on to see clearly.
- Use a walker, cane or other ambulatory aids when you're up and moving around.
- Use ambulatory aids properly.
- Don't raise your arms above your head when walking.
- Keep frequently used items, such as cordless phones, within easy reach (eg. waist level).
- Clean up spills immediately.
- Only carry as many things as you can handle safely and easily, without compromising your balance or gait.
- Eat a well-balanced diet.
- To address the frequency or urgency to go to the bathroom at night, limit your fluid intake, urinate before going to bed and routinely perform Kegel exercises (tightening and loosening of pelvic floor muscles).

## Bathroom safety

- Use slip-resistant mats in the tub or shower and on the floor beside them.
- Keep frequently used items such as soap, shampoo and towels within easy reach so you don't have to bend or reach to get them after your bath or shower.
- Use a raised toilet seat or a grab bar to assist you in getting on and off the toilet.

## Bedroom safety

- Have a light within easy reach of your bed and turn it on before you get out of bed.
- Keep the path from your bed to your bathroom clear at all times. Make sure that things like telephone cords, electrical cords, heating pads, blanket cords, bedspreads with looped fringes, and pets are secured and out of your path.
- Keep your eyeglasses within easy reach and always put them on before you get out of bed.
- Keep your bed at a suitable height so that it's easy for you to get in and out.
- Get out of bed slowly. Sit up before you stand up.
- If you use walking aids like a walker or cane, keep them within easy reach and use them every time you get up, especially at night.

## Kitchen safety

- Arrange your kitchen so that the most frequently used items are within easy reach and you don't have to climb, bend or upset your balance to get them.
- Only lean on tables or furniture if they are sturdy enough to support your weight (eg. countertops).
- Make sure there is good lighting over all your work areas.

- Wipe up spills immediately.
- If your eyeglasses become fogged up while cooking, wait for them to clear before moving.

## Living/family room safety

- Make sure all cords, furniture and clutter are kept away from pathways.
- Use higher chairs and chairs with solid armrests as your usual seats, as these are easier to get in and out of.
- Keep a cordless phone close to your common seating area so that you don't have to get up and rush to answer it when someone calls.

## Steps and stairs safety

- Make sure there is adequate lighting anywhere there are steps or stairs, as edges of steps are sometimes difficult to see.
- Use the handrail when going up and down steps or stairs.
- Use reflective tape to outline step edges.

## Outdoor safety

- Make sure paths around your home are in good repair and kept clear. Watch for moss, uneven or broken surfaces, wet and slippery surfaces, and pets or small animals.
- Make sure entrances and paths are well lit when being used at night.
- Only use ladders when you absolutely have to (eg. when there's no one to help you). Make sure the ladder has a broad base and that the base is secured and not going to slip.

# Healthy steps for general home safety

Consider the following safety tips to help you continue to stay safe and independent in your home:

- Ensure pathways are well lit.
- Never open your door to anyone you don't know.
- Install smoke detectors on every floor of your home.
- Test smoke detectors every six months.
- Plan an escape route for every room in your home.
- Install a carbon monoxide alarm in your home.
- When using a space heater, make sure it's placed away from flammable substances and materials.
- Use power bars to prevent overloading of electrical outlets.
- Make sure the "on" and "off" positions on stove dials are clearly marked.
- Keep oven mitts within easy reach when cooking.
- Have fire extinguishers placed strategically in your home. Know how to use them and check regularly to make sure they are full.
- Test water temperature before getting into a tub or shower.
- Have a first aid kit handy and keep it stocked.
- Have a list of emergency numbers near your phone.
- ESS Support Services staff will notify you when they are coming and will have a photo ID badge. Don't open the door for anyone who claims to be from ESS but does not have official photo identification.

# Healthy steps for general home safety (cont'd)

## Mobility equipment safety

- Keep mobility equipment in good condition.
- Know how to use your equipment
- Use wheel brakes on equipment that is meant to be stationary when in use (eg. Hoyer lift).

## Medication safety

- Have all of your medications reviewed by a health care professional regularly.
- Never take anyone else's medications
- Take your medications exactly as prescribed.
- If you have an allergy alert bracelet or necklace, wear it at all times.
- Use only one pharmacy for all your prescriptions.
- Every six months, sort through your medication cabinet and discard medications, including over-the-counter products whose expiry date has passed.

# Strength and balance exercises

The following are simple strength and balance exercises. Your kinesiologist or physiotherapist will tell you which ones are appropriate for you. A specific exercise program designed for your personal ability may be necessary. Your kinesiologist can discuss your needs with a physiotherapist if needed.

Remember, all exercises should be done with the following in mind:

- Do exercises slowly and at your own pace.
- Don't hold your breath during your exercises.
- If unusual pain occurs in your joints or muscles while exercising, don't continue. Let your nurse, kinesiologist and/or physiotherapist know.
- Keep track of your exercises so you can see your progress. There is a log at the end of this guide.
- **All exercises can be done one to two times per day as tolerated.**
- **Start with five (5) to ten (10) repetitions of each exercise and gradually increase the number as you feel capable, up to a maximum of 30.**

# 1

## Leg extensions

- While sitting, raise one leg until your knee is straight.
- Hold for five (5) to ten (10) seconds.
- Slowly lower your leg.
- Repeat with the other leg.



## 2 Marching

- While sitting, lift up on leg as high as you can, keeping the knee bent.
- Alternate legs, as if you were marching.
- Alternatively, you can work on one side at a time.



# 3 Toe taps

- Keeping your heel on the floor, tap the toes of one foot up and down.
- Repeat with the other leg.



# 4 Heel raises

- Keeping your toes on the floor, lift the heel of one foot as high as you can.
- Repeat with the other leg.



# 5

## Abduction

- Sit with your knees bent.
- Push both legs out and slowly return legs to centre.



# 6

## Adduction

- Sit with both knees bent.
- Place a pillow between your knees.
- Squeeze the pillow for ten (10) to fifteen (15) seconds.

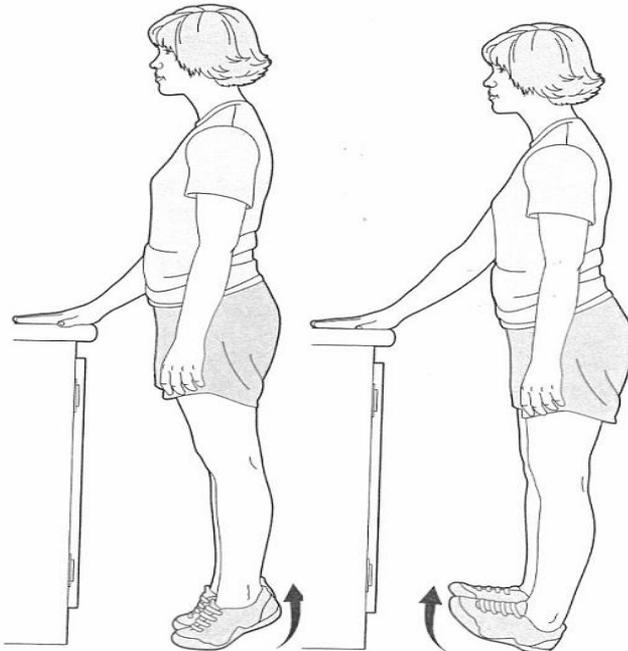


# 7 Toe/heel rises

**NOTE:** These exercises must be done while holding on to a solid object such as a countertop. Do not let go of the object during the exercises.

If you live independently and don't need a walking aid to move around, consider these additional exercises (#7, 8 and 9)

- Rise up on your toes and hold for five (5) seconds.
- Rock back on your heels and hold for five (5) seconds.



# 8

## Hip extensions

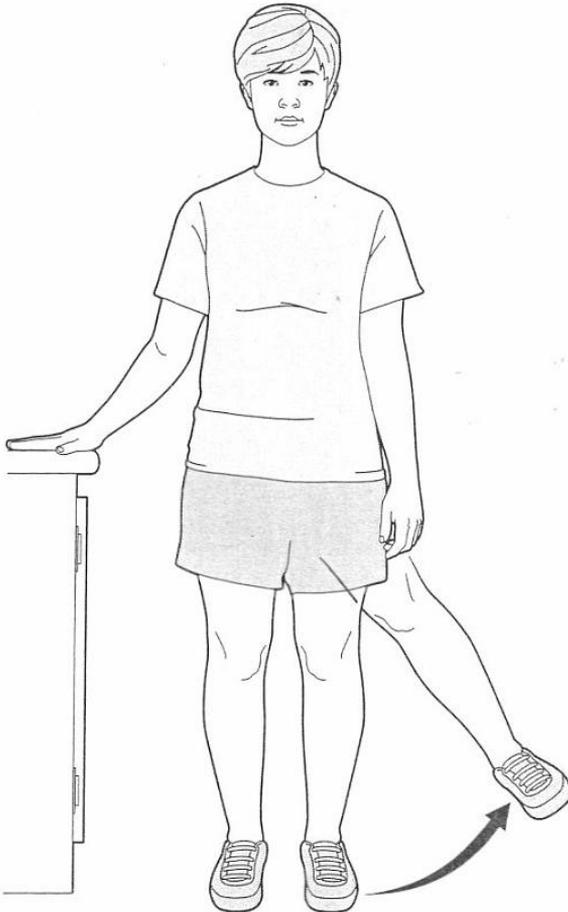
- Stand with legs shoulder-width apart and toes pointed forward while holding on to a solid object such as a countertop.
- Slowly extend one leg backwards.
- Keep your knee straight: don't lean forward.
- Repeat five times with one leg.
- Repeat with the other leg.



# 9

## Standing abduction

- Holding on to a solid object such as a counter top, move your leg out to the side, then return to the starting position.
- Don't bend your knee and don't lean forward.
- Repeat five times slowly.
- Turn around and repeat with the other leg.







# References

## **Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario**

*Falls Prevention: Nursing Best Practice Guidelines Program*

## **Public Health Agency of Canada**

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/publications/public/injury-blessure/falls-prevention-chutes/index-eng.php>

## **Ontario Public Health Association**

*Awareness and Attitudes Toward Fall Prevention: Final Report on a Survey of Ontario Seniors*



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