

# Your Guide to Independent Living

Keeping you safe from falls and injuries



Developed by Fraser Health Seniors Falls and Injury Prevention  
fallsprevention@fraserhealth.ca

Catalogue # 264151 (July 2019)  
To order: <https://patienteduc.fraserhealth.ca>

# **Your Guide to Independent Living**

## **Table of Contents**

Are you at risk for falls? .....	1
What you can do to reduce your risk for falls .....	2
Make your home safer .....	3
Getting up safely from a fall .....	4
Programs to help you reduce falls and injuries.....	5
Home activity program .....	6 - 7
Resources available in the community.....	8

# Your Guide to Independent Living

## Are you at risk for falls?

One out of every 3 seniors suffers one or more falls every year. Most falls occur at home during usual daily activities.

Did you know?

- Falls are the most common cause of injury and the 6<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death for seniors.
- 2 out of every 10 people who break their hip because of a fall die within one year.
- 5 out of every 10 people who break a hip are not able to manage their daily activities as they did before the fall.
- Women are 3 times more likely than men to be in hospital because of a fall.
- 4 out of every 10 seniors in long-term care facilities are there because they fell.

### Complete the Falls Risk Survey

Complete this Falls Risk Survey to check your risk for falling.

To complete the survey:

1. Check the box if the statement applies to you.
2. Add up the number of points for each of the statements that apply to you.

### Falls Risk Survey

- 2 I have fallen in the last six months.
- 2 I use or have been advised to use a cane or walker.
- 1 Sometimes I feel unsteady when I am walking.
- 1 I steady myself by holding onto furniture when walking at home.
- 1 I am worried about falling.
- 1 I need to push with my hands to stand up from a chair.
- 1 I have some trouble stepping up onto a curb.
- 1 I often have to rush to the toilet.
- 1 I have lost some feeling in my feet.
- 1 I take medicine that sometimes makes me feel light headed or more tired than usual.
- 1 I take medicine to help me sleep or improve my mood.
- 1 I often feel sad or depressed.

	<b>Total Points</b>
--	---------------------

If you score 4 points or more, take the survey results to your doctor and talk about ways to reduce your risk for falls.

# Your Guide to Independent Living

## What you can do to reduce your risk for falls

These are things you can do to stay strong and reduce your risk for falls.

### Begin a regular exercise program

- Do exercises that improve balance and coordination such as 'Tai Chi' at your local community centre or a '*Get Up & Go!*' exercise program offered in most Fraser Health communities. To learn more about '*Get Up and Go!*', read the section called '**Programs to help you reduce falls and injuries**' (page 5).
- Lack of exercise leads to weakness.
- Exercise will make you stronger and help you feel better. See some suggested exercises on page 6 and 7.



**“Being physically active is one of the most important ways to lower your chances of falling.”**

Have your health care provider review your medicines



- Have your doctor or pharmacist check to see if any of your medicines can make you sleepy or dizzy and put you at risk for a fall.
- As you get older, the way medicines work in your body can change. See your doctor or pharmacist regularly to review your medicines.

### Have your vision checked

- Have your eyes checked at least once a year.
- You may be wearing the wrong glasses or have a condition that limits your vision such as glaucoma or cataracts.

### Make your home safer

- Complete the checklist on page 3 to find ways to make your home safer.
- Remove small throw rugs or use double sided tape to keep rugs from slipping.
- Wear shoes both inside and outside the house. Wear well-fitting slippers with a non-slip sole and a back that covers your heel. Try not to walk barefoot or walk in just socks.
- Improve the lighting in your home.

# Your Guide to Independent Living

## Make your home safer

Complete the activities on this checklist to make your home safer.

### Stairs and Steps

- Have light switches at the top and bottom of the stairs. Make sure the stairs are well lit.
- Check that your stairs are in good repair, are free of clutter, and have a non-skid surface.
- Mark the edges of the steps with contrasting coloured non-skid tape or paint.
- Make sure there are sturdy handrails on at least one side of all stairways.
- Remove your reading glasses when you go up and down the stairs.
- Never rush up or down the stairs.

### Bedroom

- Have a light within reach of your bed. Consider a flashlight or a lamp with a 'clap-on' adaptor.
- Beds should be at a good height for easy movement on and off. Firmer mattresses will make getting in and out easier.
- Have a cordless phone by your bed.
- Make sure there is a clear path from your bed to the bathroom.
- Keep your bedding clear of the floor so it is not a tripping hazard.
- Keep your walking aid handy and within easy reach of the bed.
- Sit on the edge of your bed for a minute before getting up after a rest.

### Kitchen

- Place frequently used items in easy-to-reach locations. Store heavier items in lower cupboards.
- Avoid use of floor wax, or use a non-skid wax.
- Always wipe up any spills immediately to avoid slipping.

### Living Areas

- Make sure all walking areas are clear of telephone or electrical cords.
- Position your furniture accordingly to keep pathways clear to and from areas that you need access to.
- Have a cordless telephone within easy reach.

### Bathroom

- Use slip-resistant mats around the shower and bath. Use paint-on or self-adhesive slip-resistant strips in the shower and bath.
- Soap, shampoo, and towels should be placed within easy reach so that you don't have to bend or reach for them.
- Have grab bars installed around the bath, shower, and toilet.
- If you have trouble getting on and off the toilet seat, consider an elevated toilet seat.
- Consider using a bath seat so you can take a shower or bath sitting down.

# Your Guide to Independent Living

## Getting up safely from a fall

1. Lie still for a few minutes and assess the situation. It is important to remain calm after the fall. Only try to get up if you believe you can get up safely.



2. Slowly push yourself up onto your elbows. Lift your head. Stay still for a moment in case you feel dizzy.



3. Slowly get up onto your hands and knees. Look around for a stable piece of furniture such as a chair and move towards it.



4. Place your hands on a steady surface of the chair and rest. Move one foot forward and place it flat on the floor. One knee should still be on the ground.



5. With the chair as a support, slowly rise into a standing position. Keep your hands on the chair and rest to allow your blood pressure to adjust.



6. Turn your body and gently lower yourself into the seat. Stay seated for a few minutes. Check how you feel. Call for help if you need it. Let someone know what happened even if you feel okay. You may not be aware of any injuries.



Images used with permission from Berkshire NHS Falls Prevention Services, UK ([www.bhps.org.uk/falls](http://www.bhps.org.uk/falls))  
Adapted from Berkshire NHS Falls Prevention Services, UK and HealthLinkBC

# Your Guide to Independent Living

## Programs to help you reduce falls and injuries



### **Get Up & Go! Exercise Class**

If you are 50 or older and have trouble with balance and mobility, this is a safe exercise program for you. If you register for this program, you attend this exercise class 2 times per week for 10 weeks. At the class, you learn exercises designed to improve your strength, balance, and coordination. Over time, you will notice improvement in your ability with your daily activities, independence, and quality of life.

People who have taken part in this program say:

- "My balance has improved."
- "I feel more confident with my abilities."
- "I feel better able to perform daily activities."

### **Falls Prevention *Mobile Clinic***

You can visit the Falls Prevention Mobile Clinic if you have fallen in the past, or if you scored 4 or more points on the *Falls Risk Survey* (page 1).



You can still register if you have never fallen before but speak with your doctor first. Ask if a visit to this clinic would help you.

During your 90 minute appointment at the clinic, you will see a kinesiologist, pharmacist, and physiotherapist.

They will:

- Check your blood pressure, vision, strength and balance.
- Ask you about falls you have had in the past, medicine you are taking, and any pain you have.
- Create an activity program specific to your needs.
- Provide a summary of your visit and the recommendations to you and your family doctor.

#### **To register for a class or the clinic:**

Phone: 604-587-7866

Email: [fallsprevention@fraserhealth.ca](mailto:fallsprevention@fraserhealth.ca)

# Your Guide to Independent Living Home Activity Program

**You should only do the exercises you feel safe and comfortable doing.**

Start slowly. Begin with a few repetitions of one or two activities at a time. Try a few in the morning, afternoon and evening, rather than trying to do all at once.

If any activity causes you increased pain or significant shortness of breath, do fewer or stop that particular activity and talk with your doctor.

As you get stronger over time, gradually decrease the amount of support through your hands. Try using one hand plus a few fingers from the other hand, then progress to a few fingers from each hand, then only one hand, then a few fingers from one hand for support. Eventually consider trying with hands just hovering over the sink.

## Slow Toe Taps (can also be done sitting)

1. Stand facing the kitchen sink. Hold on with both hands.
2. Keep heel on floor and lift toes up. Hold. Relax.
3. Slowly repeat on the other foot.
4. Alternate, repeating 3 to 5 times with each foot.
5. Gradually increase until you can do this for 2 minutes.



## Up on Toes (can also be done sitting)

1. Stand facing the kitchen sink. Hold on with both hands.
2. Go up on toes with both feet.
3. Come down slowly.
4. Repeat 3 to 5 times if you can.
5. Gradually add one more repetition every few days until you can do this 15 times.

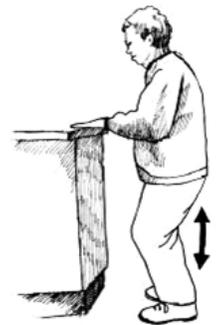


**Progression:** Gradually try to decrease the amount of support through your hands.

## Mini Squats

(Small squats only. DO NOT bend too far)

1. Stand facing the sink with your feet apart. Hold on with both hands.
2. Bend knees slightly. Keep your heels on the floor. Remember; do NOT bend too far- a small squat only.
3. Hold for a few seconds if you can.
4. Straighten up.
5. Repeat 3 to 5 times.
6. Gradually do one more every few days or week until you can do 15.



**Progression:** Gradually try to decrease the amount of support through your hands.

### Walking on the Spot (can also be done sitting)

1. Stand facing the kitchen sink. Hold on with both hands.
2. Walk slowly on the spot for 10 seconds.
3. Gradually increase your time up to 2 minutes.



**Progression:** Begin walking in your home for 3 to 4 minutes without stopping. Use a mobility aid that you normally use for walking.

### Sit to Stand

1. Sit in a firm chair with arm rests. If needed, position your walker in front of you and lock the brakes. Bring your bottom a little closer to the front of the chair if needed.
2. Bring your feet in close to the chair. Put hands on armrests if needed.
3. Lean forward and stand up.
4. Stand tall for a few seconds, holding onto walker if needed for support.
5. Reach back to hold the armrests of the chair, lean forward, and slowly lower yourself to sit down.
6. Stand up and sit down 3 to 5 times. Do one more every few days or week until you can do 15 at a time.



**Progression:** Gradually try to decrease the amount of support through your hands until you can stand up and sit down without using your arms.

### Alternate Leg Behind

1. Stand facing the sink. Hold on with both hands.
2. Lift one leg behind you, keeping knee straight.
3. Return to starting position.
4. Repeat with other leg. Continue to alternate each leg, repeating 3 to 5 times with each. Gradually do one more every few days or week.



**Progression:** Gradually try to decrease the amount of support through your hands.

### Alternate Leg Out and In

1. Stand facing the sink. Hold on with both hands.
2. Keeping toes pointed forward, not sideways, lift one leg out to the side.
3. Hold position for a few seconds if you can, then slowly lower leg.
4. Repeat with the other leg and continue to alternate each leg, repeating 3 to 5 times each. Gradually do one more every few days or week.



**Progression:** Gradually try to decrease the amount of support through your hands.

Want more information about these exercises? Contact us.

604-587-7866

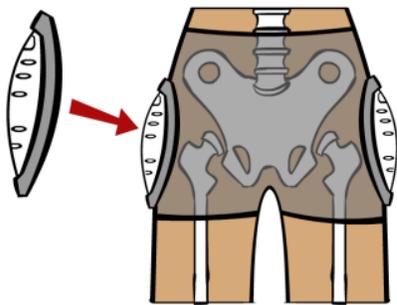
fallsprevention@fraserhealth.ca

# Your Guide to Independent Living

## Resources available in the community

### Hip protectors

Hip protectors are special garments (underwear, shorts, or pants) containing soft pads designed to protect your hips should you fall.



Hip protectors absorb the force of a fall and divert this force away from the bone. Hip protectors reduce the risk of hip fractures by up to 80%!

The hip protectors approved by Fraser Health are **HipSaver** and **SafeHip**.

When purchasing, measure the widest part of the hip to ensure that it fits comfortably.

Want information on where to buy hip protectors? Contact us.

604-587-7866  
fallsprevention@fraserhealth.ca

### Lifeline

**Lifeline** is a personal emergency response service that ensures assistance to you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

It gives you and your loved ones comfort and reassurance that you will have help right away if you push the button.



For more information:

Image Courtesy of Phillips Lifeline

**604-953-4960**

Burnaby to Langley and  
Coquitlam to White Rock

**604-854-5991**

Abbotsford to Hope

Email: [lifeline@fraserhealth.ca](mailto:lifeline@fraserhealth.ca)

### HandyDART

**HandyDART** is a door-to-door shared-ride service designed to make going places easier for you.



Image Courtesy of TransLink

It uses specially-equipped vehicles to carry passengers who need help to use public transit.

To book or cancel a trip:

**604-575-6600**

Burnaby to Langley and  
Coquitlam to White Rock

**604-855-0080**

Abbotsford and Mission

**604-795-5121**

Chilliwack