

# Falls prevention: The lifelong battle against gravity

Falls are a major cause of morbidity and mortality in older adults; they also cost the BC health care sector \$1.1 billion in 2018.<sup>1</sup> The *BCMJ* has published many articles about falls prevention for older adults; what remains salient and what is new?

The BC Guideline *Fall Prevention: Risk Assessment and Management for Community-Dwelling Older Adults*,<sup>2</sup> published in June 2021 for use by primary care practitioners and summarized in the *BCMJ*,<sup>3</sup> addresses how to identify and manage adults 65 years of age and older in the community with risk factors for falls. Although hospital, facility-based care settings, and acute fall management are outside of the guideline's scope, some of the principles may be useful in those settings. Guideline recommendations for physicians include:

- Conducting an annual screening with a “three-questions approach” or “staying independent checklist” [Box].
- If a screening is positive, doing a multifactorial risk assessment (reviewing medications; medical conditions like frailty, impaired safety awareness, impulsivity, impaired mobility, and osteoporosis; and the home environment).<sup>2,3</sup>
- If available, suggesting a Falls Prevention Clinic<sup>4</sup> or Osteofit program.<sup>5</sup>

The most effective falls prevention intervention is exercise to improve strength,<sup>6,7</sup> gait and balance training (e.g., walking backward),<sup>8</sup> core exercise training,<sup>9</sup> and safe mobility. Since sarcopenia<sup>10-12</sup> is closely related to falls risk, resistance training<sup>11</sup> is recommended as well.

*This article is the opinion of the authors and not necessarily the Council on Health Promotion or Doctors of BC. This article has not been peer reviewed by the BCMJ Editorial Board.*

Future prevention efforts may target those most at risk: women, adults age 80 and older, and those living alone or on a low income. Falls occur mainly in the household or while walking.<sup>13</sup>

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National Seniors Day is 1 October, and November is Fall Prevention Month.<sup>14</sup> Let's remember that falls prevention is so much more than removal of rugs in this lifelong battle against gravity. ■

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**BOX.** Risk factors for falls, screening tools, exercises, and resources.**Who is at greatest risk:**

- Women.
- Anyone age 80 and older.
- Those living alone or on a low income.
- People with medical conditions including frailty, sarcopenia, cognitive impairment, and osteoporosis.

**Screening tools:**

- Three-questions approach:
  1. Have you fallen in the past year?  
If so:
    - How many times?
    - Were you injured?
  2. Do you ever feel unsteady when you stand or walk?
  3. Do you worry about falling?
- Staying independent checklist: [www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/practitioner-pro/bc-guidelines/fall\\_prevention\\_stayingindependentchecklist.pdf](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/practitioner-pro/bc-guidelines/fall_prevention_stayingindependentchecklist.pdf).

**Exercises:**

- Strength: resistance exercises, lifting weights, wall pushups.<sup>6,7</sup>
- Balance: tai chi, standing on one foot, heel-toe walk, balance walk, standing from seated position,<sup>6,7</sup> backward walking.<sup>8</sup>
- Core: bridges, planks, opposite arm and leg raises.<sup>9</sup>

**Resources:****For patients:**

- Fall resources for seniors (multilingual): <https://findingbalancebc.ca/fall-resources-for-seniors>.
- *Staying Independent* (handout): [https://findingbalancebc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/staying\\_independent\\_checklist\\_interactive.pdf](https://findingbalancebc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/staying_independent_checklist_interactive.pdf).
- *Seniors' Falls Can Be Prevented* (handout, multilingual): [www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/seniors-falls-can-be-prevented](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/seniors-falls-can-be-prevented).
- *Canadian 24-hour Movement Guidelines for Adults Aged 65 Years and Older*: <https://csepguidelines.ca/guidelines/adults-65>.

**For practitioners:**

- BC Guideline: *Fall Prevention: Risk Assessment and Management for Community-Dwelling Older Adults*: [www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/practitioner-professional-resources/bc-guidelines/fall-prevention](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/practitioner-professional-resources/bc-guidelines/fall-prevention).
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