

Dementia is a progressive condition that affects memory, cognition, behavior and physical functioning. As dementia progresses, individuals may have difficulty with spatial awareness, decision-making, and balance. Individuals with dementia may have an increased risk of falls. Conditions that may contribute to an increase in fall risk are decreased mobility, cognitive impairments, medication side effects, and vision and perception changes.

## Reducing Risk of Falls for People Living with Dementia



### Environment

(Most falls happen at home.)

#### ***Remove Clutter and Hazards***

- Clear hallways and rooms of electrical cords, throw rugs, loose objects and any items that may cause an individual to trip.
- Keep the layout of furniture consistent to reduce confusion.
- Secure carpets and floorboards to prevent uneven walking surfaces.

#### ***Improve Lighting***

- Install bright, non-glare lighting throughout the home, especially hallways, bedrooms and bathrooms.
- Motion-activated lights can help reduce disorientation.
- Use motion-detected nightlights to help guide the way to the bathroom or hallways at night.

#### ***Use Signage***

- Label doors with bold text and pictures to reduce confusion.
- Contrasting colors on walls, floors and furniture can improve depth perception and make any obstacles more noticeable.
- Avoid busy patterns on the carpet and floor, which may cause disorientation and confusion.

#### ***Install Assistive Features***

- Install handrails along the hallways and stairs to provide support during movement.
- Install grab bars in the bathroom near the toilet and the shower.
- Include non-slip mats in the tub and shower.
- Raise height of toilet seats and include a shower chair to help those with balance difficulties.

#### ***Organize Daily Use Items***

- Keep essential items like medications, glasses and frequently worn clothing within easy reach.
- Reduce the need to climb or reach, which can increase the risk of falling.



### Exercise

Oftentimes, people fear that exercise may lead to a fall, but regular physical activity is the first line of defense against falls and fractures.

- Many communities offer group exercise classes, such as water aerobics and Tai Chi, which focus on balance through slow, flowing movements to help relax and coordinate the mind and body.
- Mild weight-bearing exercise, like walking, helps slow bone loss from osteoporosis and increase muscle strength.



## Health

People with hip or bone weakness, [arthritis](#), [osteoporosis](#) and blood pressure fluctuation are more prone to falls. According to the Alzheimer's Society of Canada, people with dementia are 4-5 times more likely to fall than those without cognitive impairment.

- Ask a health care provider for a fall risk assessment.
- Share any history of recent falls.
- Have annual vision and hearing checks.



## Medications

Many medications have side effects that can affect a person's coordination and balance or cause dizziness, confusion or sleepiness.

- Ask a health care provider or pharmacist to review all medications, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and minerals.
- Make sure medications are properly labeled and there are clear instructions for usage.



## Footwear

Appropriate footwear is crucial in preventing falls.

- Wear close-fitting shoes with non-slip soles and velcro straps for ease in fastening.
- Avoid socks, slippers and shoes with excessively thick soles.
- Regularly check fit and inspect for wear.
- When outdoors, make sure shoes are weather appropriate to prevent slipping on wet or icy surfaces.

As a **caregiver**, communicating with the person living with dementia is important when it comes to reducing the risk for falls. Remember to:

- **Maintain Eye Contact:** This helps to keep the individual focused and shows that you are listening.
- **Speak Slowly and Clearly:** Use simple sentences and avoid jargon to ensure understanding.
- **Use Non-Verbal Cues:** Lean on facial expressions and gestures to reinforce your message.
- **Be Patient and Respectful:** Understand that communication may be challenging and avoid actions that can escalate confusion or distress.
- **Provide Reminders:** Encourage and remind the person about using assistive devices, avoiding risky behaviors, and asking for help.



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