


Injuries Caused by Falls Among Older Adults in Renfrew County and District



Falls are the
leading cause of
injury among
older adults in
Renfrew County
and District

What we know about fall-related injuries
and what we can do to prevent them



Injuries caused by falls among older adults in Renfrew County and District

2017 Report

This report provides the reader with current data and evidence-based information on how to prevent falls among older adults in Renfrew County and District.



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This report, the report infographic and the report video are available online at www.rcdhu.com

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How to read the report

This report is designed to give the reader current information on falls among older adults in Renfrew County and District. Tools are highlighted throughout the report to support the reader with making a plan to prevent a fall.

As you read the report, consider ways to prevent a fall and make a plan to take action! You can make a *Fall Prevention Plan* for yourself, your client or a loved one.

Click on ***bold and italicized*** words to learn more about the topic.

Click on the  to download a fall prevention resource.



Look for reminders
to fill out your ***Fall
Prevention Plan*** in
green circles



Look for key messages in
grey rectangles

Background

Renfrew County and District Health Unit is one of 36 Public Health Units in the province of Ontario, Canada. It is funded jointly by the provincial government and the municipalities we serve.

The Health Unit's main office is in Pembroke, with a branch office in Renfrew. Approximately 70 staff members serve the County of Renfrew, the City of Pembroke, the Township of South Algonquin and most of Algonquin Provincial Park.

The Ontario Public Health Standards describe requirements for basic public health programs and services. These include population health assessment, surveillance, health promotion and policy development, disease and injury prevention, and health protection activities. These contribute to the physical, mental, and emotional health and well-being of all Ontarians.

Falls are a serious public health concern and have a significant impact on injured individuals, their caregivers, families and friends, local health care providers and local hospitals.

As the population of older adults continues to grow, injuries caused by falls are placing an even greater burden on the health care system.

Falls among older adults can be prevented. Renfrew County and District Health Unit is actively working with community partners and key stakeholders on fall prevention.

This report describes the scope of the problem, contributing factors and identifies local fall prevention resources.

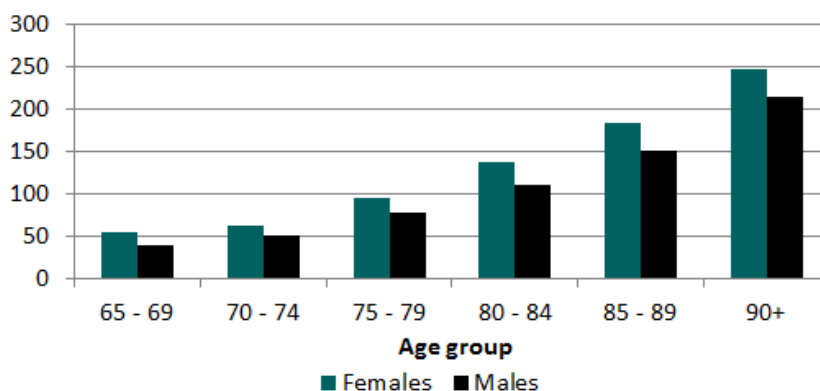


Falls are a serious public health concern

Falls are a problem in Renfrew County and District in comparison to the rest of Ontario.

Falls are the leading cause of injury among older adults in Renfrew County and District (1). The rates of fall-related emergency room visits and hospitalizations are higher in Renfrew County and District than in other parts of Ontario (1). Locally, the rates of fall-related emergency room visits increase with age (2). Across all age groups, more females than males are visiting an emergency room for fall-related injuries (2).

Emergency room visits per 1,000 population by age group, 2014 - 2016



Falls are the leading cause of injury among older adults in Renfrew County and District



The problem is worse here than in other parts of Ontario



Consequences and costs of falls

Falls affect the injured individual, their caregivers, their family and friends, local health care providers and local hospitals.

Physical injuries

In Renfrew County and District, fall-related head injuries, followed by hip and thigh injuries, are the most common (2). Research suggests that falls cause 95% of all hip fractures (3).

Mental health

Falling can lead to reduced confidence and the fear of falling again. The fear of falling is commonly reported in older adults (4). People that are afraid of falling might decrease their physical activity, which can lead to muscle weakness and poor balance, making them more at risk for a fall. Confusion and depression have also been reported after a fall.

Loss of independence

Older adults that are dealing with fall-related physical and mental health challenges might need extra care and

support. Falls are the main reason why older adults lose their independence. An estimated 40% of long-term care home admissions are due to falls (3).

Health care costs

In Renfrew County and District, about 1,800 older adults, or almost 1 in 10 visit a hospital emergency room each year for fall-related injuries (2). About 1 in 4 of these people will need to be hospitalized (2). Fall-related injuries cost 26% more than the average hospitalization (2). This could be because fall-related hospitalizations are usually 5 days longer than the average hospitalization (2). In Canada, the costs associated with falls among older adults is **over \$3 billion a year (5)**.



Concerns for the future

It is likely that there will be an increase in the rate of fall-related injuries and hospitalizations.

Aging population

Across Canada, the population of older adults is increasing (3). In 2016, there were 21,975 adults age 65 and over in Renfrew County and District (6). In 25 years, about 36,000 older adults will be living here (6). If the population of older adults grows as predicted and older adults keep falling at the same rate, in 25 years we can expect that just over 3,000 older adults will visit a local emergency room each year for injuries caused by falls. This forecasts a significant increase in the demand for our limited health care dollars.

Falls are underestimated

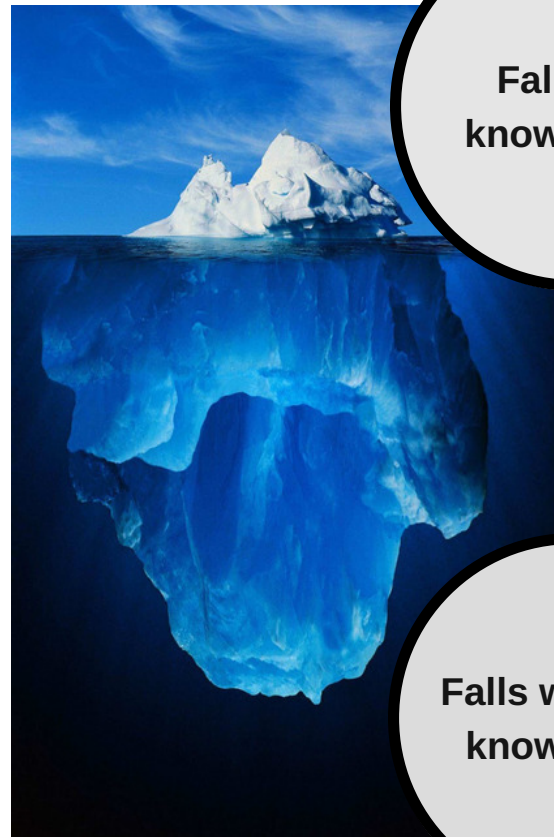
The numbers we have don't tell us the whole story. Some older adults who are injured by a fall do not get medical care, or they go to their doctor's office or a community health center instead of the emergency room. These falls are not part of the statistics in this report. The problem is much worse than the numbers suggest.



Our population of older adults is increasing quickly



The problem is worse than the numbers suggest



Falls we know about


Falls we don't know about

Work together for fall prevention

Communities need to work together to prevent falls.

Injuries caused by falls are placing a significant burden on the health care system, older adults, their caregivers and their family and friends. Falls will be a growing problem as our population ages.

Fortunately, falls can be prevented by managing, improving or removing fall-related risk factors. When properly assessed and addressed, many fall risks can be reduced or eliminated.



Make a **Fall Prevention Plan** for yourself, your client or a loved one



Falls can be prevented

Making a plan is a good way to reduce the chance of falling. As you read this report, use the **Fall Prevention Plan** to write down things you can do to prevent a fall.

Get a blank **Fall Prevention Plan**

- Click below to download/print
- Turn to page 25
- Visit www.rcdhu.com and search **Fall Prevention Plan**
- Contact the Health Unit by email or phone



613-732-3629 or
1-800-267-1097



rquathamer@rcdhu.com



Click to download the printable **Fall Prevention Plan**

Why do people fall?

A fall happens when someone loses their balance and cannot recover. The first step in preventing falls is understanding what causes them.

Biological, behavioural, environmental and social/economic factors can all affect a person's risk of falling (4). Some factors cannot be changed, such as gender or age, while others can be changed or improved, such as muscle weakness (4). Risk factors are often connected and can tell us a lot about the *overall health of a person* (7).

Biological risk factors

Biological factors may be difficult to change and include age, gender, chronic conditions and acute illnesses.

Age

Our bodies have many systems that work together to keep the body upright. When one or more of these systems is not working well, there is a greater chance of falling. As we age, it is normal for systems in our bodies to change. The natural aging process increases the chances of being injured by a fall.

For example, inner ear receptors that help keep us upright decrease with age, and our bodies can feel unbalanced. Muscle mass and flexibility decrease with age, which can reduce mobility and balance (4). We can't change the body's natural aging process, but we can work towards achieving optimal functioning.

Gender

Research suggests that women are more at risk for fall-related injuries because of their decline in muscle strength and bone mass after menopause (8).

Conditions and illnesses

Age-related changes can be worsened by chronic health problems, acute illness or disabilities such as; cognitive impairment, stroke, Parkinson's disease, arthritis, cardiovascular diseases, bowel and bladder problems, and foot disorders (4).



As we age, the risk of falling increases for both men and women

Behavioural risk factors

Our choices, actions and emotions can increase the risk of falling. A history of falling, the use of medications, alcohol or other substances, poor nutrition, lack of sleep, and inappropriate clothing or footwear are some examples of behavioural risk factors (4). Alcohol and other substances can make us more at risk for a fall (4). As we age, the effect of alcohol may be increased (4). Alcohol can also interact with medications and make us more at risk for falls because of changes in awareness and balance (4).

Environmental risk factors

Environmental risk factors can be found in the space that surrounds us. This may include furniture in the home, the home itself, and the community. Some examples of environmental risk factors include a home that doesn't meet the building code, poor maintenance, weather conditions and stairs (4).

Social/economic risk factors

People with low income, low education, inadequate housing, lack of social supports, and lack of access to appropriate health or social services are at higher risk of falling. This is because

of the increased risk of having chronic health conditions that are associated with falling or being injured by a fall (4).

Find out if you are at risk for a fall

Complete the ***Staying Independent Checklist***. Discuss the checklist results with your health care provider.



Take action to prevent a fall

Here are 6 actions you can take to decrease your risk of falling. Which ones can be added to your *Fall Prevention Plan*?

Believe you can do it

It is important to remember that change takes time. Don't give up! Caregivers can provide support for these changes. There are stages that a person goes through to make a change and some people may need more support to be successful.

Add these
6 actions to your
Fall Prevention Plan

1



Find and remove hazards in your home

2



Exercise for strength and balance

3



Manage medications and their side effects

4



Have the right safety and protective gear

5



Have regular health check-ups

6



Eat healthy meals and stay hydrated



1

Find and remove hazards in your home

Keep your home safe by identifying and removing risks.

Older adults are more likely to fall in their home than in any other public place. In Renfrew County and District, 90% of fall-related injuries occur at home (2). Most falls happen when older adults slip, trip or stumble doing everyday activities like walking or housework (2). Assess the home for hazards by completing a **home safety checklist**.



The majority of falls in Renfrew County and District happen at home

Look for hazards in key areas, such as the stairs, bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, living room and the exterior of the home. Changes can be as simple as storing heavy items in lower kitchen cupboards, reducing clutter and making sure the house is well lit.

Add
"Complete **home safety checklist**"
to your plan



2

Exercise for strength and balance

Exercise can reduce the risk of falling and being injured from a fall.

Falls are happening everywhere in Renfrew County and District. However, older adults living in Deep River, Pembroke, Renfrew and Arnprior are more likely to visit an emergency room for treatment of injuries caused by a fall (2). It is a good thing that these areas have exercise programs to help prevent falls!

Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Older Adults

Older adults need 2 ½ hours of moderate to vigorous physical activity every week in bouts of 10 minutes or more (9). Brisk walking, cycling, swimming and cross-country skiing are all examples of moderate to vigorous physical activities. It is important that older adults consult with their health care provider before starting an exercise program.



Exercise that improves strength, gait and balance helps to lower the risk of falling



Adults 65+ need 2 ½ hours of moderate to vigorous physical activity every week



Add
"Discuss exercise
with health care
provider"
to your plan



Find the right exercise program

There are over 70 exercise and fall prevention programs available in our local communities. The *List of Exercise and Fall Prevention Programs for Older Adults in Renfrew County and District* can help you decide which program to take. This information is also available by dialing **211** or calling the Health Unit.



Get involved locally

The Renfrew County and District Active Aging Network (RCDAAN) works to improve the health of older adults. By becoming an RCDAAN member you can help shape local exercise and fall prevention programming. Membership is open to community members, agencies and groups that share an interest in physical activity and/or fall prevention for older adults.

For more information on joining, membership or meetings please contact RCDAAN



613-732-3629 or
1-800-267-1097



rquatham@rcdhu.com



3

Manage medications and their side effects

Medications are complicated. Some may cause side effects that can make you more at risk for a fall.

Have a yearly medication review

MedsCheck is a free 20–30 minute appointment with your pharmacist to review all the medications you take.

Keep a medication list

Have an up-to-date list of all the medications you take including prescriptions, over-the-counter and natural health products.

Discuss side effects with a health care professional

Talk to a pharmacist or a doctor if you notice any new side effects or are having side effects that increase your risk of falling. Research suggests that drowsiness, dizziness, vision changes and low blood pressure are side effects that can make us more at risk for a fall (4).



**For questions about the
MedsCheck program,
please call 1-866-255-6701 or
TTY 1-800-387-5559
Or visit ontario.ca/medscheck**



4

Have the right safety and protective gear

To lower your risk of falling, you might need to use safety and protective gear.

Use canes and walkers properly

To measure the correct height of a cane or walker hold the arms loosely at the side of the body. The top of the walker or cane should be at the crease of the wrist. Canes should be used on the opposite side of the painful or injured leg. Consult with an occupational therapist or **physiotherapist** for a proper assessment to determine if a cane or walker is recommended for you.



Wear proper clothing and footwear

It is important that older adults have proper clothing and footwear to decrease the chance of falling. Shoes should have a good tread and support. Clothing should be easy to put on and not dragging on the ground (4).

Avoid risks

Falls can occur when older adults engage in risky behaviours (4). Risk taking behaviours include any activity that requires more than the body can handle. Some examples include, clearing snow, climbing a ladder, standing on an unsteady chair, not using glasses and hearing aids, or moving without a walker or cane when one is needed (4).

Consider hip protectors

Hip protectors are protective pads that cover the hips. If worn properly, hip protectors can reduce the risk of a fall-related hip fracture (4). Hip protectors are recommended for people with osteoporosis or previous fractures (4). Wearing hip protectors has been shown to improve confidence in older adults that have a fear of falling (4).

5

Have regular health check-ups

Taking care of yourself is important at any age! How well you care for your body can impact the risk for having a fall or a fall-related injury.

Have regular check-ups

A check-up can help you and your doctor find out if you have any health conditions that could lead to falling. Older adults with multiple health problems can have a higher risk of falling and being injured (4). Find a family doctor or nurse practitioner who is accepting new patients by visiting ***Health Care Connect***.

Have your eyes/ears checked

It is normal for vision and hearing to change with age. A change in vision or hearing could cause anyone to fall! Wear hearing aids, glasses and contact lenses as recommended.



Register for Health Care Connect
By phone: 1-800-445-1822
Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Online: visit www.ontario.ca and search Find a Doctor



6

Eat healthy meals and stay hydrated

Enjoy a variety of nutritious foods

A well-balanced diet with adequate energy and protein helps with body strength, balance and mobility. Include vegetables and fruit, whole grains, meat and alternatives (beans, lentils), and milk and alternatives such as cheese, yogurt or fortified soy beverage.

Drink water

Drink liquids throughout the day, because dehydration can lead to dizziness and falls.

Take the *Nutri-eScreen®*

This online questionnaire can help you find out how you are doing with choosing foods that help you stay healthy and active.

Consider calcium and vitamin D supplements for strong bones

Osteoporosis affects approximately 1 in 4 women over the age of 50, and 1 in 8 men

over age 50 (4). Osteoporosis increases the risk of a fall-related fracture (4). Older adults who have had a fracture from a fall should be screened for bone health by their health care provider and informed about ways to help keep bones healthy. Discuss resistance training, weight bearing exercises, balance and gait training, and taking a calcium and vitamin D supplement with your health care provider (4).



What can everyone else do to prevent falls?

Everyone plays an important role in preventing falls among older adults.

There are many ways to be involved in preventing falls in Renfrew County and District. Here are 6 examples of what you can do!

Primary health care providers should ask older adults once a year about falls

Health care providers can find out more about their role in preventing falls at stopfalls.ca



Be in the know about key resources and websites



Expand your knowledge by taking an online fall prevention course



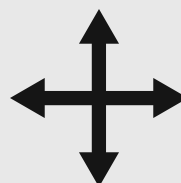
Connect with other exercise and fall prevention professionals by joining the online community of practice



Encourage and support an older adult to make a Fall Prevention Plan



Help shape exercise and fall prevention programming by joining RCDAAN



Raise awareness by sharing this report, the report video and the report infographic



Examples

Consider what Diane and Glen, their caregivers and health care providers can do to prevent them from being injured by a fall.

Diane's Story

Diane is a 68 year old woman who lives in a two-story semi-detached home with her husband. She has osteoporosis, but is generally healthy. She has glasses that she uses for seeing close up and far away. The couple has two large dogs and a cat. Her husband collects newspapers and has them in various spots in the house, including the floor and the stairs. She finds that she has to rush to the washroom, especially at night.



Glen's Story

Glen is a 79 year old man who lives alone in rural Renfrew County and District. He fell while doing chores on his farm last year. Over the last year, his grandchildren have been doing the chores for him so he doesn't fall again. Before his fall, he was physically active every day. He has noticed that he is weak and unsteady. He has a cane, but rarely uses it.



Consider the following fall prevention interventions for Diane and Glen.

Diane is generally healthy. She has her husband for support and most of her risk factors can be improved. The risk factors that may increase her risk of falling or being injured from a fall include osteoporosis, decreased vision and environmental risks in her home.

What can Diane, her caregivers and her health care provider do?

1. Diane could fill out a home safety checklist to identify hazards in her home such as clutter (newspapers), lack of night lights, large pets and stairs.
2. Diane should continue to have regular vision checks with her optometrist.
3. Diane could work with her health care provider to identify strategies to achieve optimal bone health.
4. Diane and her husband could read the *You CAN prevent falls!* booklet to learn more about preventing falls.

Glen lives alone in a rural area of Renfrew County and District. He has fallen before and has limited his physical activity. He is experiencing weakness and balance issues. He doesn't use his cane.

What can Glen, his caregivers and his health care provider do?

1. Glen could complete the *Staying Independent Checklist* and discover that he is at risk for falling. He could discuss the results with his health care provider.
2. Glen could enroll in a fall prevention exercise class to improve his strength and balance.
3. Glen could get his cane resized so that it fits him.
4. His grandchildren could read this report to learn more about their role in preventing falls.
5. Glen could join RCDAAN.

Conclusion

Anyone can be injured by a fall, but older adults are more at risk for serious physical and mental health impacts from falling. Falls can be prevented.

There is an urgent and increasing need for older adults, their health care providers, caregivers, family members and friends to take action to prevent falls. Put your **Fall Prevention Plan** into action!



Click the report poster and the report video to view

Injuries Caused by falls among older adults in Renfrew County and District

Falls are the leading cause of injury among older adults in Renfrew County and District

Falls can be prevented

 Find and remove hazards in your home	 Have regular health check-ups
 Exercise for strength and balance	 Have the right safety and protective gear
 Manage medications and their side effects	 Eat healthy meals and stay hydrated

Make a plan for yourself, your client or a loved one

Find out more about what we know about falls and what can be done to prevent them
Read the full report at: www.rcdhu.com

Injuries caused by falls among older adults in
Renfrew County and District



Fall prevention plan

Name _____

Make a plan for yourself, your client or a loved one

Falls are the leading cause of injury among older adults in Renfrew County and District



Things to do	By when	✓



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