

Injury Prevention Key Messages

Key Message:

Follow the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults (under 65) and Older Adults (65 +)

Why is the key message important?

For older adults injuries due to falls can be very serious and can be the starting point for decline in overall health. Many older adults never fully recover their state of overall health and independence prior to the fall.

The physical activity guidelines are developed based on extensive research and provide a minimum goal to achieve that would provide overall health benefits.

Research indicates that physically active older adults have a reduced risk of falling than sedentary older adults.

Details of the Key Message:

- The guidelines recommend at least 150 minutes per week of moderate to vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity at intervals of 10 minutes or more.
- Moderate intensity activity will cause a participant to sweat a little and breathe harder.
- Vigorous intensity activity will cause a participant to sweat and to be “out of breath” or “huff and puff”.
- Examples of activity are: brisk walking bicycling, dancing, swimming lengths, fitness exercise class, running, cross-country skiing, urban/Nordic pole walking etc. The intensity of the exercise is dependent upon the effort exerted during the activity.
- Include muscle and bone strengthening activities using major muscle groups at least 2 days per week.
- Perform physical activities to enhance balance and prevent falls.
- More physical activity provides greater health benefits.

Examples of how to support the message:

- Introduce a 10 minute activity break for activities where there is sitting for periods of time (ie: 10 min break to achieve moderate or vigorous activity)
- Increase your activity time to include a walk prior to or after the activity.
- Organize a “Try It” week where you could try different physical activities to increase awareness and participation opportunities in your area.
- Utilize participants that have an expertise eg. Someone could lead a multicultural dance routine for a 10 minute break or provide a “Try It” class.

Key Message:

Wear supportive footwear.

Why is the message important?

Often falls, back pain, knee pain or injuries are the result of poor choices in footwear.

Details of the message:

- Different footwear is required for various activities and weather conditions.
- Wear non-slip soled shoes indoors.
- Wear proper fitting shoes that can be properly done up at all times.

Examples of how to support the message:

- Talk about what to look for when purchasing new shoes.
- Remind people that slippers for inside use should have a non slip sole to reduce the risk of falling.
- Display or distribute some information on proper footwear.
- Display various types of shoes indicating their positive attributes (ie. non slip soles, ankle supports) and their challenges (very long laces, loss of traction on the soles of the shoes)
- Ask a representative from a shoe store to present information on types of shoes, how to tell if a shoe is supportive, types of boots for winter weather.

Key message:

Have regular medical checkups for vision, hearing and physical health.

Why is the message important?

As we age there are changes to sight, hearing, medications, muscle strength and bone density that require routine monitoring. Poor vision or incorrect prescriptions for glasses are key risk factors for falls. Poor hearing can be a safety hazard if you are unable to hear warnings or sounds that would prevent an injury. Medications have various side effects that could lead to an injury.

Details of the message:

- Many falls are related to medications that can cause dizziness. Be aware of the side effects of medications and how medications react together.
- Eyesight should be checked once a year to ensure eye prescriptions are up to date.
- Hearing loss can lead to misunderstanding medical and other instructions resulting in a higher risk of injury.

Examples of how to support the message:

- Encourage all participants to see their doctors (eye doctor, dentist, medical doctor for regular checkups).
- Suggest participants discuss bone density, vitamin D and calcium supplements with your doctor. Brittle bones can increase your risk of injury in a fall.
- Provide examples of positive stories to encourage visits to their doctors. For example a visit to the eye doctor and new eye prescriptions makes seeing everything much clearer.
- Connect with the Peel Health Department and ask about eye, teeth and hearing screenings that may be available to older adults. Consider hosting screening sessions at your activity location or host a special event.
- Hand out tip sheets on questions to ask during a medical, eye, hearing or dental visits.
- Provide sensitivity/accessibility training for Instructors to empathize with participants who live with hearing or site restrictions.
- Be sure classes and activities offered are inclusive and accessible. Discuss ways to do this.eg. assistive listening devices, prop doors open, colour contrasting.)

Key message:

Remove Clutter.

Why is the message important?

Keeping pathways wide and clear can help prevent an injury or a fall from occurring. Also over stacked shelves can be hazardous

Details of the message:

- Often things that have “always been around” are not noticed any more and can cause an opportunity for an injury. For example a rug that is always bunching up in an entrance way poses a risk for participants. A hallway where the lights are very dim or perhaps one light is always burnt out reduces the ability for people to see. Remind participants to look at their surroundings with “new eyes” and to look for items that could pose a risk for injury.

Examples of how to support the message:

- Remind participants, staff and volunteers to always report instances where there is a potential for injury. (ie a wet floor, a light out, a broken door etc.
- Perform an accessibility audit at the activity location. This can be found in senior friendly accessibility checklists.
- Review facility safety protocols to ensure a safe environment.

- Go through a de-cluttering exercise to demonstrate how to tidy up.
- Bring someone new into your area to view the surroundings through safety eyes.
- Hand out some home safety check lists to participants and ask them to go through or “audit” their homes.
- Host a safety week for the facility and home to promote ways to reduce clutter and risk of falling by listing one item/section to check/cleanup each day. (For example check your stairs today for clutter, check your rugs for bunching or sliding, ensure your tub has a non stick bottom or mat, install a grab bar, etc.

Key message:

Use secure handrails.

Why is the message important?

Using handrails serve an important purpose to help provide stability and assist in weight transfer to prevent injury or falls.

Details of the message:

- Remind participants to always check a hand railing for stability prior to using it.
- Point out hand rails in your facility/location so participants are aware of them, encourage use of hand rails before they become a necessity. (Don’t forget to wash your hands or have sanitizer at the end of handrails.)

Examples of how to support the message:

- Remind participants to use a hand sanitizer, or wash your hands as soon as possible after using a public hand rail.
- Try using the handrails around your facility to ensure their safety and if they allow a participant to safely attend the program
- Complete an audit to determine requirements for hand rails. Refer to the Mississauga Accessibility Design Handbook. Encourage the use of handrails prior to an individual’s need to use them.
- Consider the addition of a hand rail in the activity room. Would it allow for inclusion of more participants? Or participants can position themselves close to a wall to use for support or use a neighbour’s shoulder.

Key message:

Use walking aids correctly.

Why is the message important?

Many walking aids are not properly fitted to individuals and/or individuals have been supplied with a walking aid and do not have a clear understanding on how

to use the tool properly. Often walking aids are misused and as a result place individuals and/or caregivers/spouses at a higher risk of injury.

Details of the message:

- Remind participants that a walking aid is a tool to make walking safer and can be used for rest periods eg. A walker with a seat.
- Using the tool incorrectly could put them or their caregiver/spouse in danger of injury.
- Remind people to have their walking aids checked periodically to ensure they are still in good condition (ie. wheels, brakes) and the correct height for proper walking.

Examples of how to support the message:

- Host a work shop on walking aids. Include information on the importance of using them correctly, maintaining them well, what to avoid when using various walking aids.
- Display information on walking aids including a video on how to use the walking aids properly.
- Perform an audit at your program location to check accessibility.
- Host a Try It day. Try using a cane, or a walker or a wheel chair. It could build empathy and understanding.
- Be certain your activity location has been adjusted for the increased space requirements needed for walking aids.

Key message:

Eat healthy meals and drink plenty of water.

Why is the message important?

Eating regular healthy meals and being adequately hydrated are important to prevent falls and injury.

Details of the message:

- Eat a minimum of 3 healthy meals per day.
- Eat 7 servings of fruit and vegetables per day
- Drink water more often than juice, coffee or tea.
- Follow “Eating Well” as part of Canada’s Food Guide

Examples of how to support the message:

- Ensure snacks that are offered at activities are nutritious such as fruits/vegetables,
- Create a culture of healthy eating at the work place for employees. Ensure nutritious snacks are provided at meetings when snacks are available.
- Encourage eating fruits and vegetables as snacks and part of a healthy meal.

- Hand out/distribute/display the Canada's food guide.
- Put up a display or poster than indicate what healthy serving sizes are.
- Host a meal planning and shopping workshop to help develop and plan meals for each week. (eg. How to shop and cook for one).
- Encourage learning how to read food labels (ie. sodium content) and to be aware of marketing/promotion tricks that make some food choices seem healthy.

Key Message:

Use medication safely always following directions.

Why is the message important?

The average older adult in Ontario takes six prescription medications and three over-the-counter medications a day. These medications combined can cause harmful interactions. Interactions can make a drug stronger, weaker or mixed together may cause unwanted side effects. About one in five Ontario older adults are hospitalized each year for drug interaction problems.

Details of the message:

- Side effects of medications can affect mobility, appetite, sleep patterns, etc.
- Medications can have a direct impact on an individual's abilities, moods, and overall health status.
- All medications are drugs. Vitamins, herbal remedies, prescription and over the counter. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any medications /drugs.

Examples of how to support the message:

- Distribute/post information that promotes the importance of taking medications correctly.
- Inform individuals that anyone taking 4 or more medications can speak to their pharmacist and ask for a medication review/med check. This service is covered by OHIP and will provide information about the medications being taken and if there are interactions between the drugs.
- Invite a local pharmacist to speak to your group about medications.
- Encourage individuals to purchase all medications/drugs from the same pharmacy/pharmacist. This allows the pharmacist to check the drugs prescribed for interactions or side effects.
- Use a magnifier if the print is too small on medications.
- It is okay to ask for an alternate format for a prescription instructions (ie. large print).