

How to Prevent Falls with Good Nutrition

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Falls can be devastating for seniors. In BC, falls are the number one reason that seniors go to the hospital.¹ Research has also found that 1 in 3 seniors in BC will fall at least once a year.¹ Falls can cause severe pain, broken bones, head injuries and other serious medical conditions.¹ This can decrease a person's ability to move and be independent, and can result in a move to a long term care home. Fall risk is the reason that almost half of all patients go into long term care.¹ Falls are very common and can severely impact a person's quality of life. Preventing falls as much as possible is very important.

How can we prevent falls? Make the home environment as safe as possible, and use the right walkers or wheelchairs if needed. Taking the right medications and dose is also important.² We can also help prevent falls by focusing on getting enough nutrition. Malnutrition is directly related to falls.^{2,3,4,5,6}

Here are some ways good nutrition can help prevent falls:

Having enough protein maintains muscle strength and balance.^{3,7,8}

Getting enough calcium and vitamin D builds strong bones, and makes them less likely to break if a fall happens. Vitamin D also improves muscle function and balance.^{2,9} It is estimated that over 80% of adults over the age of 71 do not get enough calcium or vitamin D.¹²

Drinking enough fluids [is also important](#). Dehydration can cause dizziness, lack of coordination and confusion, which can all cause falls.^{2,3,4}

For someone with diabetes, it is very important to manage blood sugar well, as both low or high blood sugar can cause falls.^{3,4}

Having enough iron or B vitamins is important to prevent anemia. If you have anemia, it can make you dizzy or weak, and more likely to fall.^{3,4}

Clearly, nutrition is important in preventing falls. Battling malnutrition can be difficult for seniors. For example, 45% of people who arrive at the hospital in Canada are already malnourished.¹⁰ This means that almost half of adults in the community are not regularly eating enough [and](#). Other research found that 33-60% of seniors were at risk of malnutrition.³ Why is this? Here are a few reasons why it's difficult for seniors to get enough nutrition^{3,4}:

- Difficulty getting to the grocery store – not able to walk or drive
- Reduced ability to cook and eat due to chronic illness, disability or pain
- Medication side effects - nausea, dry mouth, lowered appetite
- Decreased income – less able to afford healthy food
- Difficulty chewing – missing/broken teeth, dentures not fitting well
- Difficulty swallowing

- Decreased taste and smell sensations
- Loss of appetite and thirst
- Constipation
- Depression, isolation and lack of social support

With all of these challenges, older adults need as much support as possible to prevent malnutrition and falls. Below is a list of ideas for where to start with improving nutrition. If you are a senior – take action today to prevent a fall! If you know a senior - you could prevent falls by encouraging and helping them to have good nutrition!

- Eat enough and regularly
 - Use community food resources such as meal delivery and grocery delivery
 - Cook and eat with friends and family members as much as possible
 - Eat smaller meals more often if your appetite is low
 - Try using nutrition supplement drinks if you are not getting enough food
- Get enough protein: aim for 25 - 30 grams of protein per meal, or one protein source at each meal and snack^{7,8}
 - Protein is naturally found in meat, eggs, dairy, beans, lentils, tofu, nuts and seeds
 - You can also add whey protein powder or skim milk powder to many foods and drinks to boost the protein content
- Stay hydrated - drink at least 1.5 - 2 liters per day^{3,13}
 - Remember: any fluid counts - water, milk, nutrition supplement drinks, tea, coffee, juice, soup, ice, fruits and vegetables high in fluid (cucumbers, watermelon)
- Get enough vitamin D and calcium
 - Adults over 50 need a vitamin D supplement of at least 800 IU daily^{9,14}
 - Adults over 50 need 1200 mg of calcium daily¹⁵ – it is best to get this from calcium rich foods such as dairy products, fortified orange juice, fortified alternative milks, canned salmon/sardines, almonds, white beans
- Work with your doctor to
 - Manage your blood sugars
 - Get better dentures or get help with a swallowing issue
 - Treat anemia
- For personalized advice and a full nutrition assessment, ask for a referral to see a Registered Dietitian!

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