

Identifying Fall Risk Factors

Research has identified many risk factors (see table below). Most falls are caused by the interaction of multiple risk factors.

The more risk factors a person has, the greater their chances of falling. Health care providers can help reduce a person’s risk by working with the individual to reduce or minimize risk factors.

The most important modifiable risk factors are:

- Lower body weakness
- Difficulties with gait and balance
- High risk medications, particularly use of psychotropics
- Limitations in any ADLs or IADLs
- Visual impairment
- Pain and stiffness from arthritis
- Depression

Additional risk factors known to be associated with falls include: ¹

BIOLOGICAL/ INTRINSIC	BEHAVIORAL	SOCIAL & ECONOMIC	ENVIRONMENTAL
Impaired mobility	History of falls	Low income	Poor building design and/or maintenance
Balance deficit	Fear of falling	Lower level of education	Inadequate building codes
Gait deficit	Multiple medications	Illiteracy/language barriers	Stairs
Muscle weakness	Use of:	Poor living conditions	Home hazards
Advanced age	Antipsychotics	Living alone	Lack of:
Chronic illness/ disability:	Sedative/hypnotics	Lack of support networks and social interaction	Handrails
Cognitive impairment	Antidepressants	Lack of transportation	Curb ramps
Stroke	Excessive alcohol	Cultural/ethnicity	Rest areas
Parkinson’s disease	Risk-taking behaviours		Grab bars
Diabetes	Lack of exercise		Poor lighting or sharp contrasts
Arthritis	Inappropriate footwear/clothing		Slippery or uneven surfaces
Heart disease	Inappropriate assistive devices use		Obstacles and tripping hazards
Incontinence	Poor nutrition or hydration		
Foot disorders	Lack of sleep		
Visual impairment			
Acute illness			

1 Updated from: Scott, V., Dukeshire, S., Gallagher, E. & Scanlan, A. (2001). A best practice guide for the prevention of falls among seniors living in the community. Monograph prepared for the Canadian Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers of Health.