

# GUIDE

## **Suggestions to Avoid Falls in Hospital**



The Ottawa Hospital | L'Hôpital  
d'Ottawa

### ***Disclaimer***

*This is general information developed by The Ottawa Hospital. It is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified healthcare provider. Please consult your healthcare provider who will be able to determine the appropriateness of the information for your specific situation.*

At The Ottawa Hospital (TOH) we seek to offer the best experience for every patient and family. We want to work with you and your family to provide the care, compassion and service you need. This includes patient safety. Patient safety is an important concern for the health care team.

Accidental falls can happen to anyone in any place at any time such as walking outside or in your home, even in the hospital. We know that not all falls can be prevented but together we can reduce your risk of falling while you are in The Ottawa Hospital and limit injury if you do fall.

At TOH we have a fall risk reduction and safety program that ensures we will:

- Assess all in-patients for their risk for falls.
- Offer “Universal Interventions” or safety precautions to all patients.
- Add, “Individualized Interventions” or extra safety precautions that are specific to patient individual needs, to your patient care plan if needed.
- Communicate what role you can play in decreasing your risk for falling.

# What is a fall?

At TOH both falls and near falls are a concern to us. We define them as:

**Fall:** is an abrupt, uncontrolled, downward change in position, in which the potential for injury exists or in which an actual injury occurs. For example, you suddenly fall to the floor when you are walking to the bathroom.

**Near fall:** is when a fall is prevented through helpful actions. For example, you slip or start to fall but the nurse catches you or you grab the handrail to right yourself.

## Why do people fall?

There are many reasons why people fall, but when they occur together they can lead to a fall. Common reasons for falling may include such things as your physical health, strength, thinking and decision-making ability, the medication you are taking, and the type of shoes you are wearing. Reasons for falling may also include being in a new and unfamiliar environment, how far the bathroom is from your bed, the lighting, or medical equipment used for your care.

# **Who is at risk for falls?**

It is true that children and seniors, especially those over the age of 75 years have a higher risk of falling than the general population. Adults fall for different reasons. Certain medical conditions may place you at a higher risk for falling, such as a stroke, Parkinson's disease, severe arthritis or osteoporosis. Some medical conditions affect a person's balance, leg strength and movement, or ability to make safe decisions.

## **While you are at TOH**

You may not have a fall while you are in the hospital, but we want to help you decrease your risk. During your hospital stay a nurse will assess you for your fall risk and implement universal interventions. The nurse will speak with you or your family member and ask how you usually manage at home. It is important to let us know if you have had a fall within the last three months. People who have had a recent fall are more at risk for falling again. We ask questions to learn more about you and design a care plan that meets your needs. The health care team will ask you about:

- History of previous fall(s);
- Changes in your mobility, balance and gait;
- Changes in your thinking and decision-making;
- Toileting needs;

- Sensory impairments. For example if you need your glasses or hearing aids to safely walk;
- How many and what type of medications you are taking;
- And equipment used as part of your care.

## **How will TOH staff help?**

Based on your fall risk the health care team will add individualized interventions to your care plan if necessary. The team will also communicate with you and your family the interventions that can help you reduce your fall risk and what you can do. Most important, do not hesitate to ask for help when you would like to get up or walk!

## **What are universal interventions?**

These are safety precautions the nurse and your health care team will put in place and carry out for all patients. They include:

- Provide an orientation to the unit.
- Encourage daily activity!
- Perform a daily assessment for pain and provide treatment as needed.
- Assess for changes in your memory.

- Leave the bed height in the lowest position to make it easier for you to get in and out of it.
- Avoid using 4 bedside rails where possible. You will not always have all bedside rails up because you may risk climbing over them to get out of bed and falling. You can discuss this with your nurse.
- Avoid using restraints.
- Leave the call bell within your reach.
- Wipe up spills immediately. Let the staff know if a spill happens.
- Offer a raised toilet seat.

## **Tips for patients on preventing falls**

1. Call the nurse if you are weak or dizzy. Use the call bell **before** you get up. Change your position slowly when getting up: sit and count to 10 **before** moving. When standing up use **both** hands for support.
2. When sitting down, back up to the chair until you feel your legs **touching** the seat or bed. Reach for the armrest before sitting.
3. Get out of bed as much as possible!
4. Do not use a walker or tables with wheels as a support to help you stand up. These can move away from you and you could fall.

5. Use the call bell in the bathroom if you are weak or need help. Ask for help at night.
6. Bed or chair alarms may be used to remind you to call for help.
7. Wear non-skid footwear for walking.
8. Wear clothing that does not drag on the floor. You can trip if clothing is too long.
9. Ask to have your telephone, call bell and table placed within easy reach.
10. Ask for your walker, hearing aids and glasses to be placed close to you and use them to help you move safely around your environment.

## **Tips for families on preventing falls**

1. Tell the nurse about your family member's medical history or of any changes in their condition.
2. Tell the nurse if your family member complains of being weak, dizzy or "confused".
3. Consider staying with your family member when they are upset or climbing out of bed.
4. Always leave the bedside table, telephone and call bell within easy reach.
5. Tell the nurse when you are leaving if your family member is at risk of falls.

You are welcome to speak with the health care team about your concerns, questions or suggestions on how to reduce the risk of falls. Please share this fall prevention information with others and help us keep your family member safe.

## Notes

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