



Summary of Results

Older Adults Falls Prevention Survey, Ottawa, 2012

In 2012, Ottawa Public Health conducted the Older Adults Falls Prevention Survey by telephone with 1,050 Ottawa adults aged 65 years and older living at home. The survey was designed to fill a gap in local data on falls prevention knowledge and behaviours, specifically those recommended to seniors by Ottawa Public Health based on the current evidence: annual visits to check general health, vision and review medications; regular physical activity including strength and balance activities; adequate calcium and vitamin D intake; and, removal of trip hazards and installation of home safety devices.

Results are intended to help service providers who work with older adults to tailor awareness and education campaigns on preventing falls and to inform program planning and policy development.

Although results show 9 out of 10 seniors agree that falling is a concern for people their age and is preventable, their responses to other questions indicate that they are not taking all steps to prevent falls. Community-wide support and programs that reach seniors before they fall are important to reduce falls and to motivate all seniors to take action.

Encouraging findings

Most seniors are visiting their health professionals regularly...

- 8 of 10 seniors had their last vision exam less than a year ago.
- 7 of 10 seniors had their last general physical exam less than a year ago.

Ottawa's older adults know the importance of physical activity...

- 9 of 10 seniors think that being active for the recommended minimum of two and half hours a week (30 minutes, 5 times a week) can reduce their risk of falling.

Seniors know making their homes safer can help prevent falls...

- 9 of 10 seniors think installing home safety devices such as hand rails, grab bars and night lights can reduce their risk of falling.
- 9 of 10 seniors have railings along the stairs inside their homes or leading into their homes.

Some public health concerns

Seniors are not optimally using home safety devices...

- Overall, only half of seniors have a grab bar or rail installed in the bathtub or shower. Men, younger seniors and seniors with higher income or education are even less likely to have one installed.
- Younger seniors were also less likely to use extra night lighting or have a rubber mat or non-slip surface in their bathtub or shower. Overall, only 44% of seniors regularly use extra night lighting to help them move about their homes at night.
- Just half of seniors say that all of their mats and rugs are secured to the floor.

Fewer than half of older adults are getting the right amount or the right kinds of physical activity...

- Half are getting at least two and half hours (30 minutes, 5 times a week) of aerobic activity every week.
- Only 38% participate in strength activities at least twice a week.
- Only 36% participate in balance and stability exercises at least once per week.

Many seniors are not aware that medications may increase their risk of falls...

- Fewer than half of seniors know that taking four or more medications daily can increase fall risk.
- 43% of seniors take four or more different medications daily.

Ottawa's older adults need more vitamin D and calcium...

- Half of all seniors think that taking a vitamin D supplement daily can help prevent falls. 54% of women and 35% of men take a vitamin D supplement daily.
- Only one in four seniors are getting enough calcium especially from calcium-rich foods.

Implications for programs & practice

1. Promote calcium-rich foods.
2. Promote daily vitamin D supplementation.
3. Enhance screening for risk of falls in older adults.
4. Improve access to age-friendly physical activity, including strength and balance activities.
5. Design age-friendly spaces to improve access and safety and reduce hazards.
6. Educate older adults about side-effects from both prescription and over-the-counter medications.

To learn more about the Older Adults Falls Prevention Survey and falls prevention resources, see the fact sheets and infographics at www.ottawa.ca/healthreports.