

- Eating customs / Lifestyles

You are what you eat

The Glengarry News · 19 Oct 2022 · 7

Throughout your life, eating healthy, balanced meals plays an important role in keeping you feeling great and preventing chronic diseases. It can also help prevent muscle and bone loss, reducing your risk of falling and breaking bones, notes the Eastern Ontario Health Unit.

In addition to following Canada's food guide, when it comes to preventing falls and fall-related injuries, 2 elements in particular are essential: calcium and vitamin D.

Calcium

Calcium helps lower your chances of falling and the risk of injury caused by falls because it makes your bones strong. If you don't have enough calcium in your diet, your body will draw it from your bones, ultimately making them weaker. In order to avoid this, adults over the age of 50 need to consume 1000 to 1200 mg of calcium every day. Individuals at risk for or living with osteoporosis should consume 1500 mg of calcium per day.

How much calcium your body absorbs depends on the food it's coming from, so it is important to vary its sources. Below are some foods that will help you reach your required calcium intake:

Cow's milk and fortified nondairy beverages

Cheese

Canned fish with soft bones (such as salmon or sardines) Yogurt

Tofu (set with calcium) Almonds

Dried figs

White beans

Milk pudding

Calcium supplements can also help you reach your required calcium intake. There are many types of calcium supplements, so talk to your healthcare provider to find out which is best for you.

Most supplements are absorbed better by the body when taken with meals. And whether you get

your calcium from your diet or supplements, try to spread your intake throughout the day as it's better absorbed in small doses of 500 mg or less at a time.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is the other half of the dynamic duo that helps keep your bones strong and prevent injury from falls. Vitamin D increases calcium absorption and helps build the skeleton, improving your strength and balance in the process.

Your body produces vitamin D when your skin is exposed to the sun, but you can also get it through foods high in vitamin D like fortified cow's milk or fortified non-dairy beverages, egg yolks, certain types of fish (salmon, sardines) and liver.

It's also a good idea for adults over the age of 50 to take a vitamin D supplement of 400 IU daily. This is because the body requires more vitamin D at that age than what we can get from food, but also because the body's ability to produce vitamin D through sun exposure is reduced.

Medication and alcohol

Some medications can cause drowsiness, loss of balance, dizziness or confusion... which could ultimately lead to a fall.

Follow the tips below to stay safe:

Ask your doctor questions about the medication you are taking.

Always go to the same pharmacy for your medication.

Always read the instructions that come with your medication.

Take the recommended dosage that your doctor and your pharmacist prescribed.

Have your medication in a prepackaged format so you don't forget to take it or take too much.

Beware: There may be side-effects between your medications, even the over-the-counter, vitamins and natural products. Talk to your doctor and pharmacist.

If your medication makes you dizzy or sleepy, adjust your activities accordingly.

Tell your doctor or pharmacist right away if you do not feel well after starting a new medication or if the dosage has changed.

Beware of the effects between your medication and alcohol. That includes sleeping pills, and cold & allergy medication.

Don't take someone else's medication.

Have a list of all your medication (including vitamins, natural products and over-the-counter medications) at home and on you when you leave your home.

If you have allergies to some medications, wear a bracelet/necklace (that indicates what you are allergic to) on you at all times.

Once a year, check your medication for expiration dates.

Return your expired medication to your pharmacy. Do not throw it in the garbage or flush it in the toilet. It is not good for the environment.

Talk to your healthcare professional about alternatives to medication.

Most falls can be avoided

Falls are not a normal part of aging. However, falls are one of the main causes of hospital admissions in all age groups. They especially affect older adults, impacting their mobility, overall health and ultimately affecting their independence and quality of life.

An estimated 85 per cent of injury-related hospitalizations for seniors are due to falls.

About 20 per cent of elderly people experience at least one fall each year. The good news is that most falls are avoidable through simple precautionary measures and lifestyle changes.

Seniors are encouraged to go through a checklist to determine if they are at risk.

Have you fallen in the last six months? People who have fallen once are likely to fall again.

People who have been advised to use a cane or walker may already be more likely to fall.

Unsteadiness or needing support while walking are signs of poor balance. Steadying yourself by holding onto furniture when walking at home is a sign of poor balance.

Have you ever asked yourself what you would do if you fell?

If you do take a tumble, the first thing to do is to check and see if you are hurt. If you are OK, take your time and get up slowly. Lie on your side and bend one leg and lift yourself up onto your elbows or hands. Pull yourself to a chair or sturdy furniture or object, then go on your knees and place both hands on the chair or the object.

Place your stronger leg in front, while still holding on to the chair or object. Stand up slowly. Turn around slowly and sit down. Remain calm. If you can't get up, yell for help. If you are alone and you have a phone close by, call 911. If your phone is out of reach, try to slide yourself to it. In the meantime, make some noise with your cane or another object to get the attention of someone. Get yourself in a position where you would be more comfortable and wait for help to arrive. If you are able to, get a pillow and/or a blanket to put under your head and cover yourself if possible. If you can, move your joints regularly to facilitate circulation. After your fall, make sure to see a doctor. You might have injured yourself even if you don't feel pain. Also check why you fell. Did you trip over something or feel dizzy just before? Tell your doctor all the details of your fall. You might have felt dizzy because of your medication or it might be a sign of an illness. If you tripped over something, it might mean that you need to make changes in your home to make it easier for you.