

Falls

Falls are the primary cause of many accidents and fatality-related traumas among people over sixty-five years of age. It is estimated that the incidence of falls that occur within the Parkinson's population is four times higher as compared to individuals without Parkinson's within the same age group. This increase in risk can be explained by the motor symptoms of the disease: slowness in movement, rigidity, shaking and postural instability (especially in the advanced stages of the disease), in addition to a tendency to freeze up in certain situations.

However, it is widely known that there is a greater risk of injury while at home or near home as compared to anywhere else. The majority of falls occur while performing routine activities such as getting up from bed, from a chair, from the toilet or even while moving from one room to another.

How to prevent a fall?

- Ensure that your environment is safe.
 1. **Lighting:** accessible light switches at the entrance of each room, night-light in the bedroom, the hallway, and the bathroom to avoid dimly-lit areas and shadows.
 2. **Flooring:** Slip-resistant rugs, carpets solidly fixed in place, slip-resistant wax on flooring, avoid cluttering passageways by consciously storing any electrical cords, clothes, shoes or any potentially obstructive objects.
 3. **Stairs:** Adequate lighting, power switches at the top and bottom of the stairway, securely attached railings on either side of the stairway; first and last steps made visible by sticking a brightly coloured sticker, ensuring stairs are well-maintained and free of all obstructions.
 4. **Kitchen:** Placing food and accessories well in reach to avoid bending or climbing, small and secure stepladder, sturdy table.
 5. **Bathroom:** Railing placed in the bathtub, shower and next to the toilet, rubber mat or slip-resistant stickers in the bathtub and shower, slip-resistant rug, doors without a lock in case of emergency situations
 6. **Sofa:** well-adjusted, comfortable but not too soft in order to be able to get up with ease
 7. Consult an occupational therapist if necessary.

- Follow an adapted exercise program developed by a physiotherapist in order to improve posture, flexibility and balance.
- Wear comfortable shoes adjusted to the size and shape of your feet, with flexible in-soles and low heels. Never walk with socks only and never wear slippers that are too large, or loafers or sandals with an opening at the heel.
- Use an appropriate walker: walking stick, walker, two-wheeled walker, cane. Refer to an occupational therapist for a personalized consultation or adjustments if necessary.

What to do in case of a fall if you are able to get up?

The first thing to do is to catch your breath. Check if you've been injured. Even if you seem not to be injured, take the time to make certain before you get back up.

Five steps to get back up:

1. Lie on your side; bend the leg that is facing upward and lift yourself up either by your elbows or your hands ;
2. Do your best to get yourself close to an armchair, or any solid object, by sliding towards it and then using both hands on the armchair to get onto your knees ;
3. Lift your strongest leg forward while maintaining a good grip on the armchair ;
4. Stand up ;
5. Carefully turn and then slowly sit down.



A video is available on the “Institut Universitaire de gériatrie de Montréal” website, which demonstrates how to safely get up from the ground after a fall (in French only):

www.iugm.qc.ca/sante-aines/infochute/chute-tombe/chute-tombe-victime.html

What to do in case of a fall if you're unable to get back up?

- If you're feeling unwell or are unable to get up, first attempt to get help.
- Call for help if you believe someone might be able to hear you.
- Of course, if you have an emergency button or a handheld cellphone, use it.
- If not, try to slide yourself towards a telephone or an area where you can be heard.
- Make noise with your cane or any object around you to attract attention.
- Wait for help by placing yourself in a position that you're most comfortable in.
- If you can, place a cushion underneath your head and cover yourself with clothing or a blanket to stay warm.
- Try to keep moving your joints occasionally to facilitate blood circulation and to avoid stiffness.

References

The InfoParkinson Guide

Public Health Agency of Canada website: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/publications/public/injury-blessure/falls-chutes/index-eng.php>

