

# If you fall or witness a fall, do you know what to do?

We all fall from time to time. With age, both the number of falls and the likelihood of injury increase. So, it's important to know what to do if you fall or if you see someone else fall.

Reacting properly to a fall can make the difference between a “serious” fall and a “less serious” one. It often helps to decrease any physical and psychological consequences. It enables you to regain your confidence more quickly and to continue to be as independent as possible.

## ***A few facts***

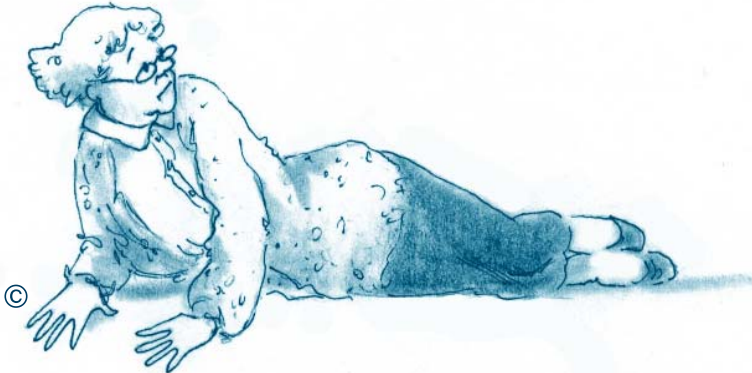
- 20-30% of seniors (age 65 and over) have a fall every year; half of them have more than one fall.
- Falls are the most common cause of injury among seniors.
- More than 85% of injuries



# What to do after a *fall...* if you **CAN** get up

The first thing to do is to catch your breath. Check and see if you are injured. Even if you think you're OK, take your time before getting up again.

**Follow these five steps for getting up:**



**1** Lie on your side; bend the leg that is on top and lift yourself onto your elbows or hands.



**2** Pull yourself toward an armchair or other sturdy object, then kneel while placing both hands on the chair or object.



# What to do after a *fall...* if you **CANNOT** get up

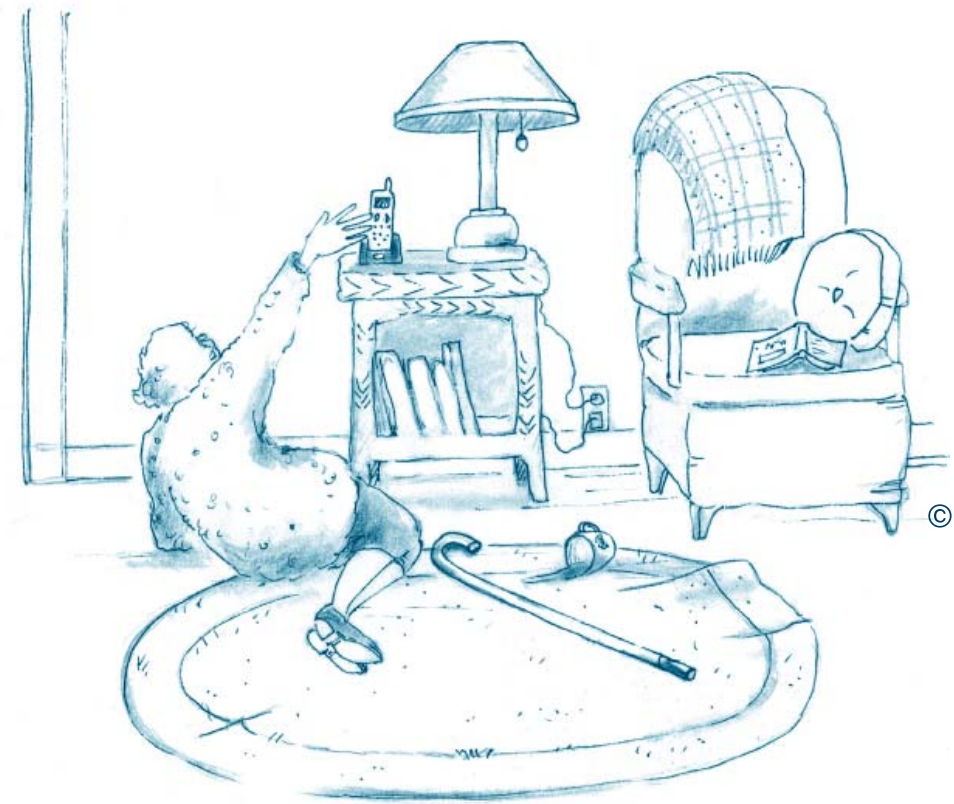
If you feel any discomfort or are unable to get up, try to get help.

**1** Call out for help if you think you can be heard.

**2** If you have an emergency call device or telephone at hand, use it.

**3** If you don't, try to slide yourself towards a telephone or a place where you will be heard.

**4** Make noise with your cane or another object to attract attention.



# What to do after a *fall*...

## if you are the **WITNESS**

If you see someone fall, resist the urge to get the person up immediately. First check for condition: Is the person conscious or unconscious? Does the person appear to be injured? Reassure the person.

**If the individual cannot get up**, call for help and administer first aid if you are able to do so. Help the person find a comfortable position and keep him or her warm using an item of clothing or a blanket.

**If the individual appears able to get up**, proceed with care and follow the steps below:

- 1** Bring a chair close by; help the person turn onto one side and bend the upper leg; help the person into a semi-seated position.





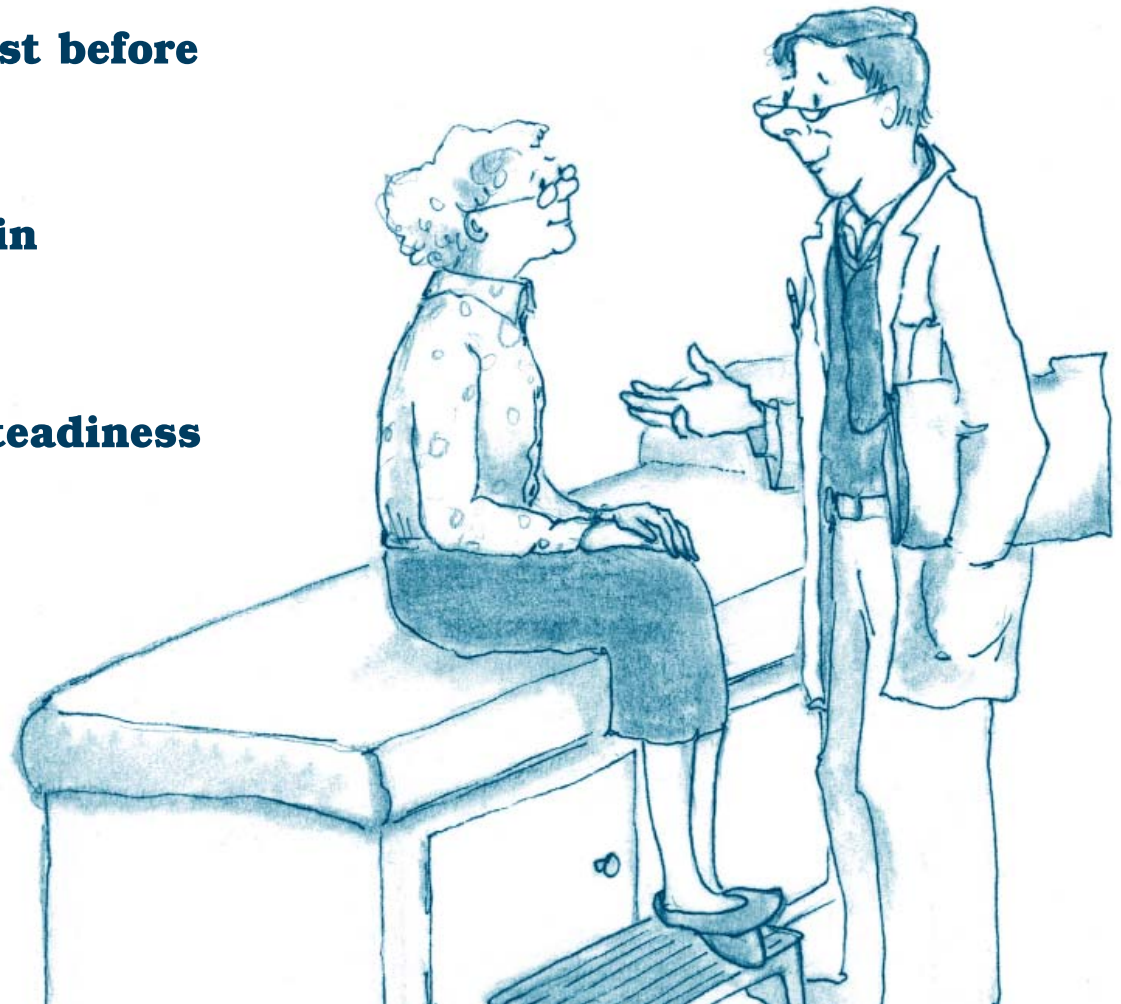
# When to see a **doctor**

Whether you're the victim or the witness of a fall, never underestimate its seriousness. Even if it appears no harm was done, there could be after-effects.

**Here are some of the reasons for seeing a doctor:**

- **loss of consciousness just before or after the fall**
- **injuries**
- **a strong or lingering pain**
- **dizziness**
- **nausea**
- **overall weakness or unsteadiness**
- **headaches**
- **vision problems**
- **drowsiness**

Symptoms may appear in the days that follow a fall. If you fall, take note of your condition. If you witness a fall, take note



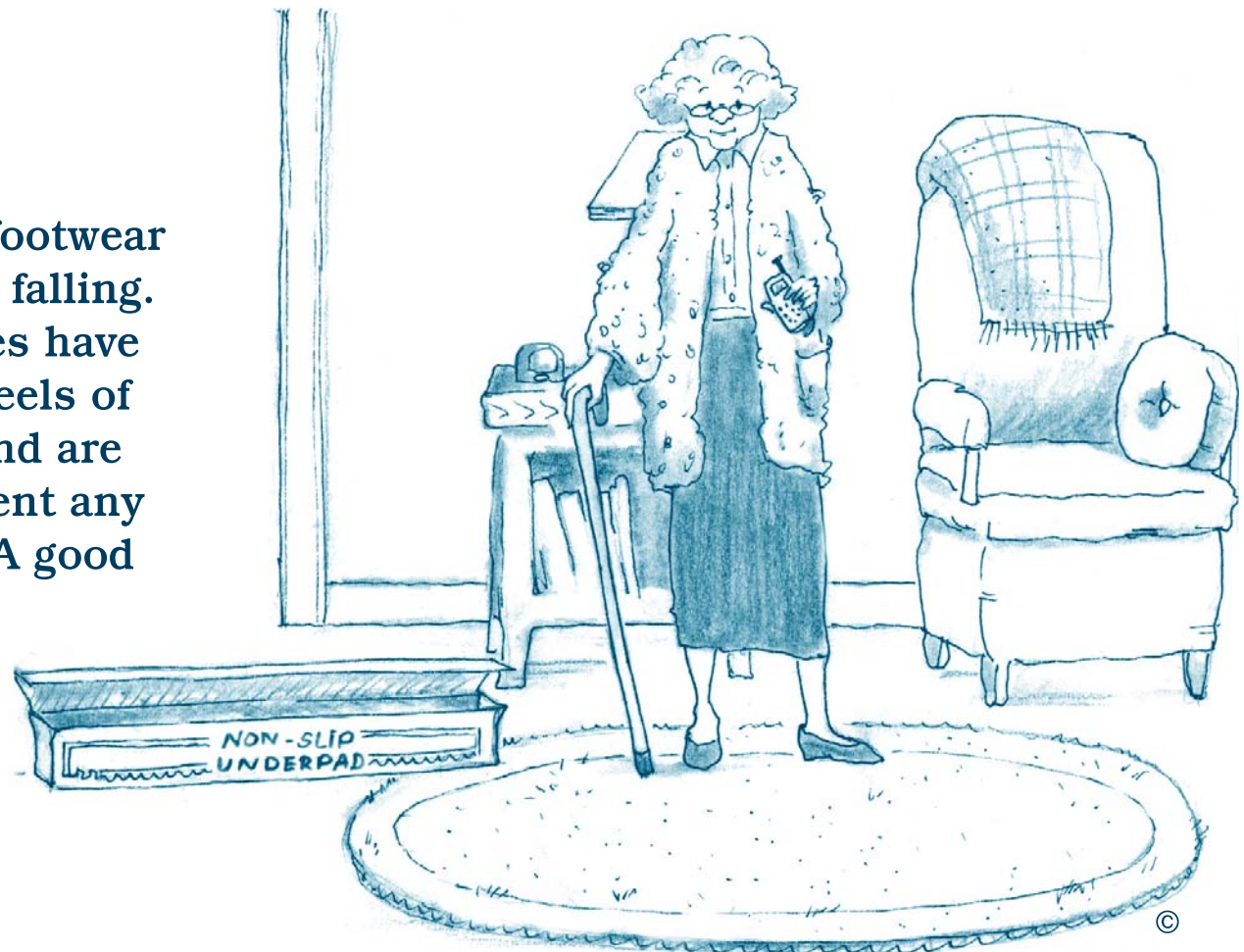
# Preventing another fall

## Surroundings

It's a good idea to check your environment to discover any fall hazards, particularly if you have had a fall. Simple changes to prevent falls include grab bars, non-slip rugs and a handrail on both sides of the stairs.

## Shoes

Wearing unsuitable footwear increases the risk of falling. Make sure your shoes have non-slip soles and heels of reasonable height, and are wide enough to prevent any twisting of the foot. A good heel cup that goes around the back of the heel also stabilizes the ankle.

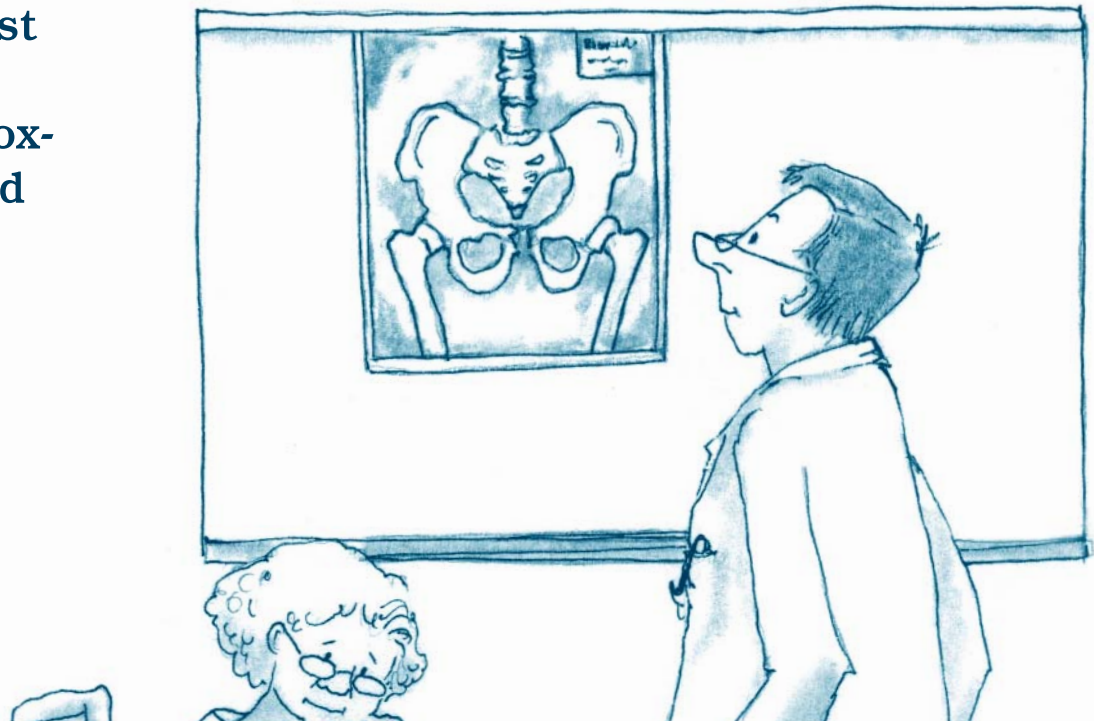


# Consequences of a fall: the physical aftermath

A fall is often accompanied by physical complications. As a matter of fact, falls are the most common cause of injury among seniors.

Seniors who fall commonly suffer bruises and scrapes, fractures or muscle damage. They can also develop pneumonia, blood clots or other after-effects after they lie on the ground for an extended period.

Hip fractures are the most common injury. Among people over age 65, approximately 35% of fall-related injuries resulting in hospitalization are due to hip fractures.





# Consequences of a fall: the psychological aftermath

It's normal to be more cautious after a fall, but the fear of falling again may lead you to restrict your activities. This is a vicious circle: the less active you are, the more your strength and flexibility decrease, which increases your risk for falling. What's more, if you isolate yourself because you feel vulnerable, the reduced social contacts may undermine your spirits.

Discussing your fear of falling with your family or with health professionals should help diminish your fear. A physiotherapist can also suggest various rehabilitation exercises that will help you.

Taking a fall brings your physical limitations to the surface and may jeopardize your independence. It's a difficult experience to go through. Knowing the potential consequences of a fall and knowing what to do will set you on the path to a faster physical recovery and a return to enjoying life.

