

Five easy ways to prevent falls and stay active

If you have osteoporosis and a fear of falling, your first instinct may be to dial down the physical activity in your life. After all, there's less risk of stumbling if you're safely seated in a chair or car. Isn't there?

This kind of thinking is decades old, says Cathy McNorgan, a physiotherapist in Kitchener, Ontario, who works with clients with both osteopenia and osteoporosis. "Inactivity can actually increase your risk for fractures. Participating in a regular exercise program while taking a few other sensible precautions is the best way to decrease your risk of falling."

A lifestyle that includes regular physical activity can help you maintain your bone mass, your muscle mass and strength, and keep you flexible and limber. And all of these help reduce your risk for injury and fracture.

Don't let a fear of falling rule your life and leave you sitting on the sidelines. Instead, consider these five simple fall prevention strategies:

1. Focus on leg and core muscle strength

- Learn proper exercise technique from resources designed specifically for people with osteoporosis. These could be DVDs, websites or live exercise classes listed on the OP website.

- Do some form of leg and core muscle strengthening every day to make you more stable and secure on your feet. Exercises like side leg lifts, calf raises and wall slides are often good choices. Ask your healthcare provider for a *fracture risk assessment* and for exercise recommendations that are best for you.

2. Get moving with Nordic walking poles

- Weight bearing activity, core muscle strengthening, improving balance and attention to good posture are all common fall prevention strategies. Recent research shows that Nordic walking targets all four of these areas, says Mandy Shintani, an occupational therapist with Urban Poling Inc. and who teaches an ACTIVATOR fall prevention program. "Nordic walking poles also increase upper body strength, provide stability and confidence while walking, and can be used for support during standing exercises," she adds. People with balance issues should consider walking poles, such as the ACTIVATOR poles



designed for safety & stability, which are becoming an increasingly popular choice with therapists and hospitals.

3. Practise balance exercises

- "There is clear evidence that performing challenging balance exercises can reduce falls, especially if performed most days of the week," says Professor Lora Giangregorio from the University of Waterloo, co-author of the *Canadian Physiotherapy Association's Too Fit to Fracture: exercise recommendations for individuals with osteoporosis or osteoporotic vertebral fracture*.
- These can be individual stationary exercises, such as standing on one foot, or more-challenging programs, such as Tai Chi.

4. Get the right gear

- Wear supportive, yet lightweight, shoes at all times. Shoes should have firm, non-slip soles.

5. Rework your living and office space for activity

- Remove home and office tripping hazards by eliminating clutter, such as loose rugs, storage boxes and magazine racks. Then look for opportunities to sit less and move more. For example, at the office regularly get up from your chair and stretch, take a stroll, stand during phone calls or accomplish a walking errand.

ABOUT URBAN POLING INC.

Vancouver based Urban Poling Inc. designs and distributes five styles of Nordic walking poles, all with ergonomic and easy-to-manage strapless handles. It is the largest Nordic walking pole distributor in Canada and offers the only Urban Poling Nordic walking certified instructor training program recognized by Canada's nine largest fitness and health organizations. Urban Poling provides training across Canada and has certified 2,500+ instructors & therapists. www.urbanpoling.com

