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*Remember: You can live well with osteoporosis!*

# Being Proactive about Stair Safety

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Improved lighting, secured railings and frequent inspections are necessary when parents aren't so steady, Nira Rittenberg writes.

Many stairs are not built uniformly and rebuilding them can help. Handrails, a stair tread and stair height that can accommodate your step and foot properly are key.

**I was visiting mom and noticed that she almost missed a stair when we were walking down together. It scared me. She wasn't fazed.**

It is my job to go into people's homes and, amongst other things, discuss the physical layout and safety features of their abode. The truth is that stairs are often dangerous. Many hospital visits occur after falls on stairs and many falls can be prevented, but you have to be willing to make some changes. Even one step can create a problem, but we know that there are numerous factors that can make stair use a problem.

Physical changes, such as poor eyesight, increased fatigue or a change in balance, may occur as we age. Mom may be wearing slippery-bottomed shoes, or carrying an object that makes her unsteady, or she may just not be paying attention.

Most people say that a trip or slip or fall "can happen to anyone." This is true. However, seniors are at greater risk and the consequences of a fall are often more serious for them. One can break bones, suffer a head injury or injure muscles and other soft tissues. Many older adults who have a serious fall don't ever regain the confidence and sense of control from a psychological perspective. This predisposes them to more falls.

A proper assessment by an occupational therapist to look at your gait and environment may be warranted. Sometimes, strengthening and conditioning can help with safety. Physiotherapy may be advisable as well.

One quick and simple solution to avoid falls or trips is to improve lighting on the staircase. Good lighting can help identify the steps and help to ensure that you can see the area well. A switch at the top or bottom, or installing a motion-activated light

## Fracture

### Fact:

Injuries from falls include hip fractures, head and brain injuries, and sprained or broken wrists and ankles.

can help. The staircase area should be more lit than the surrounding areas.

Many stairs are not built uniformly and rebuilding them can help. Handrails, a stair tread and stair height that can accommodate your step and foot properly are key. Ideally, there should be railings that you can wrap your entire hand around. Railings should extend beyond the top and bottom step. Inspect them to ensure they are not wiggly, loose or broken. And fix them if they are.

If vision is a problem, you can apply textured tape to the stairs to warn the user that the stairs are ending. If you don't have broadloom, you may consider a stripe or some contrasting colour to ensure that you see the nosing of the tread.

Proper footwear means non-slip soles with a supportive fit. Proper shoes can change one's gait and maximize balance.

Rushing to get a phone call or to answer the door is also not advisable. Carry a cellphone or install a phone on each floor. An intercom system can help if you can't move well and need to greet someone at the door.

Many people leave objects on the stairs or landings. This is easily remedied and should be avoided. When cleaning stairs, ensure that the finish is dull and non-slip (no waxing) if there is no carpeting.

Training to go up and down stairs while utilizing both hands on handrails may be useful to some. Discuss this with a therapist. Consider a fall-sensing alert device that you can wear and will activate if you have a fall and are alone. Talk to your therapist about your needs.

Alcohol or certain medications can impact balance and stability. This is important to factor in. Taking extra time and care can help mediate these problems. Discuss your medications regularly with your family doctor.

If the stairs are too dangerous, there are stair glides and lifts that can be installed that can make for safe living scenarios.

Some individuals choose to allocate their bedroom, laundry room and bathroom all on the main floor, which allows you to minimize or eliminate the use of stairs.

Before you embark on renovations and decisions, talk things through and arrange for a professional consultation. Ultimately, it is a lot less costly than a fall or injury.

(In Ontario) you can reach out to [healthcareathome.ca/central/en](http://healthcareathome.ca/central/en) to find your local office to discuss getting a home safety assessment.

*This article was published in the Toronto Star, Monday, February 19, 2018. Reprinted with permission, courtesy Nira Rittenberg. Nira is an occupational therapist who specializes in geriatrics and dementia care at Baycrest Health Sciences Centre and in private practice. She is co-author of Dementia: A Caregiver's Guide available at [baycrest.org/dacg](http://baycrest.org/dacg).*

## We Welcome Your Feedback

- Have a question?
- Is there an osteoporosis-related topic that you would like to see featured in the newsletter?
- Looking for a great volunteer opportunity?

Please contact us by calling Osteoporosis Canada's toll-free number **1-800-463-6842** or emailing [copn@osteoporosis.ca](mailto:copn@osteoporosis.ca).

## *Coming Soon!*

### You can help shape the new Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Diagnosis and Management of Osteoporosis! We want to hear from you.

In an upcoming special issue of COPING, you will have the opportunity to express your opinions in an on-line survey on the range of recommendations to be included in the update of the 2010 Guidelines for osteoporosis care and fracture prevention. Your answers to this survey are very important and will ensure the new Guidelines address the wants and needs of Canadian patients for years to come. This survey should take you less than 10 minutes to complete.

Guidelines are an especially important resource. They help doctors and other healthcare professionals understand and recommend the treatment options best suited to each individual. Guidelines provide answers to questions like "What is my risk of breaking a bone?", "Do I need medication and, if so, for how long?", "What role do nutrition and exercise play in preventing fractures?" In essence, Guidelines are fundamental to all of us being able to embrace COPN's motto and "live well with osteoporosis."

Multidisciplinary teams of experts from Osteoporosis Canada's Scientific Advisory Council will focus on four key themes in the Guidelines - pharmacotherapy, risk assessment, nutrition and exercise. Each team also includes a member of the COPN Executive Committee and a primary care physician. They will all contribute hundreds of hours of their time to research and assess the latest scientific evidence, then develop the recommendations that will go into the new Guidelines.

Please watch for the survey to come to you in an email in the next few weeks. Thank you in advance for expressing your voice!

## FUNNY BONE:

"I never drink coffee at lunch – I find it keeps me awake for the afternoon." – Ronald Reagan

## Introducing Osteoporosis Canada's New Recipe Section

Have you checked out the new recipe section on [osteoporosis.ca](http://osteoporosis.ca)? These recipes have been created specifically for Osteoporosis Canada and feature dishes with a focus on calcium and protein, nutrients key to keeping your bones and muscles strong and healthy. COPING will feature a delicious yet simple to make recipe every issue. Try the Stilton Scalloped Potatoes which contain **246mg** calcium per serving.

### STILTON SCALLOPED POTATOES

**Preparation Time:** 20 mins

**Cooking Time:** 1 hr 10 mins

**Serves:** 6-8



A typical side dish that makes it to the table to sit alongside a ham is scalloped potatoes. They can be rich and decadent especially when people enjoy the cheese flavour. So this recipe has reduced fat and more nutritious vitamins with the addition of sweet potatoes to the mix.

#### Ingredients

2 tbsp (30 mL) canola oil  
1/4 cup (50 mL) all purpose flour  
3 cups (750 mL) skim milk, warmed  
1/2 cup (125 mL) crumbled Stilton cheese  
1 tsp (5 mL) Dijon mustard  
1/2 tsp (2 mL) salt  
1/4 tsp (1 mL) pepper  
3 Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced  
2 small sweet potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced  
1 small onion, thinly sliced

#### Preparation

Heat oil over medium-high heat in saucepan. Add flour and cook, stirring for 1 minute. Whisk in milk slowly and continue whisking gently for about 5 minutes or until mixture is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon. Remove from heat and add blue cheese, mustard, salt and pepper; whisk until smooth. Set aside.

Alternately layer Yukon Gold and sweet potatoes with onion in lightly greased or sprayed 13 x 9-inch (3L) casserole dish. Pour milk mixture evenly over potatoes.

Bake in 375 F (190 C) oven, uncovered for about 1 hour or until potatoes are golden brown and tender when pierced with a knife.

For more information, [click here](#) to view the recipe online