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A Word from Best Doctors

With baby boomers accounting for a growing share of the working age population, the greying of Canada's workforce will have significant repercussions on families, workplaces and the healthcare system.

According to the 2011 Census, 42.4% of Canada's working age population (ages 15 to 64) is between 45 and 64 years – a record high proportion¹. Meanwhile, the country's senior population is also exploding. The 2011 Census notes that the number of seniors aged 65 and over increased 14.1% between 2006 and 2011 – a rate of growth more than double the 5.9% increase for the Canadian population as a whole².

The spike in both the number of older employees in the workplace and seniors who will require care has serious implications. An older population means more age-related illnesses, which will have a widespread ripple effect.

One of the more common age-related diseases is Alzheimer's, which will affect more Canadians in the coming years. Consider this: In 2011, 747,000 Canadians were living with Alzheimer's or other types of cognitive impairment – this figure is projected to increase to 1.4 million by 2031³.

Aside from the long-term ramifications of various afflictions, an aging population also means even seemingly innocuous activities – like walking outside in the winter – can have devastating consequences. In Canada, most injury-related hospitalizations for seniors are due to falls, but falls don't only affect the elderly. In 2009-2010, 63% of seniors and one-half of adolescents were injured in falls, as were 35% of working age adults⁴.

These numbers underscore the importance of arming ourselves with information so we can make wise decisions both in our daily lives and overall approach to healthcare. This is the only way to ensure we continue to enjoy healthy and active lifestyles well into our golden years.

- 1 Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/120529/dq120529a-eng.htm>
- 2 Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/120529/dq120529a-eng.htm>
- 3 Alzheimer Society of Canada, <http://www.alzheimer.ca/en/About-dementia/Dementias/What-is-dementia/Facts-about-dementia>
- 4 "Injuries in Canada: Insights from the Canadian Community Health Survey," Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-624-x/2011001/article/11506-eng.htm>

FACT

Family caregivers are the invisible backbone of Canada's health and long-term care system. Consider the following:

- **More than one in four (27.8%) employed Canadians are responsible for the care of elderly dependents.**
- **Almost one in five (16.8%) employed Canadians are responsible for both childcare and eldercare, balancing dual demands at home and demands at work.**
- **Family caregivers in Canada contribute over \$5 billion of unpaid labour annually to the healthcare system.**

*Source: the Canadian Caregiver Coalition (<http://www.ccc-ccan.ca>)

Falls: The leading cause of injury in Canada

Skating, skiing, snow-covered trees – while winter brings many wonderful things, we could all do without the icy streets and sidewalks that are ubiquitous at this time of year. Perhaps unsurprisingly, for all winter-related causes of serious injuries (excluding motor vehicle collisions), falls on ice are by far the most common cause.

In 2009-2010, falls on ice accounted for 7,138 hospital admissions in Canada – a greater number than that for all winter sports and recreational activities combined. About half of these cases were for people aged 60 and older, and 70% were among people aged 50 and older¹.

In Canada, falls are a leading cause of injury, accounting for about 50% of all injuries resulting in hospitalization. In 2004, falls were the leading cause of injuries resulting in permanent partial disability (47%) and total permanent disability (50%)⁶.

All falls are potentially serious, so it's important to see a doctor immediately, even if you think you're not hurt. Falls can also be a sign of muscle weakness, balance problems, a medical problem or other health issue, so seeking medical care immediately is essential.

5 The Canadian Institute for Health Information, http://www.cihi.ca/cihi-ext-portal/internet/en/document/types-of+care/specialized+services/trauma+and+injuries/release_17jan12

6 "The Economic Burden of Injury in Canada," Smartrisk, <http://www.parachutecanada.org/downloads/research/reports/EBI2009-Eng-ExecSumm.pdf>



The impact of falls & what you can do

More than 90% of all hip fractures among seniors are caused by falls, underlining the serious injuries that can result from falling. Even more concerning is that 20% of seniors die within a year of a fracture⁷.

Aside from the personal toll of falls, the economic impact is staggering: Falls were the leading cause of overall injury costs in Canada in 2004, accounting for \$6.2 billion (31%) of total costs⁸.

Despite these sobering statistics, there is some good news. Taking precautionary measures can prevent many falls. Here are a few tips:

- Make sure you have appropriate winter footwear. Wear boots or shoes made with rubber or neoprene soles – they offer better traction on icy surfaces.
- One of the best ways to avoid falls at any time of the year is to maintain a regular exercise regimen. Make sure to incorporate exercises that focus on strength and balance.
- Get your eyes checked regularly. The wrong prescription eyewear increases the chances of falling and routine eye exams will also help catch problems such as glaucoma or cataracts.



7 Report on seniors' falls in Canada, Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2005, <http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/HP25-1-2005E.pdf>

8 "The Economic Burden of Injury in Canada," Smartrisk, http://www.parachutecanada.org/downloads/research/reports/EBI2009-Eng-Exec_Summ.pdf

Alzheimer rates in Canada set to soar

Alzheimer's disease comes under the spotlight in January, which has been designated Alzheimer Awareness Month. Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia, affecting memory, thinking and behaviour. A progressive disease, Alzheimer symptoms worsen over time. While the vast majority of people living with Alzheimer's are over the age of 65, early onset Alzheimer's can affect people in their 40s and 50s.

The impact of Alzheimer's extends well beyond the person living with the disease. In 2011, family caregivers spent 444 million unpaid hours a year looking after someone with dementia. This number is projected to increase to 1.2 billion unpaid hours a year by 2040.⁹

The economic costs of dementia are also significant: In Canada, the combined direct (medical) and indirect (lost earnings) cost is \$33 billion. This number is expected to skyrocket to \$293 billion a year by 2040.¹⁰

Diagnosing Alzheimer's is complicated, and there is no single test that shows whether a person definitively has the disease. Diagnosis requires a careful medical evaluation that includes the following:

- Thorough medical history
- Mental status testing
- Physical and neurological exam
- Tests (e.g. blood tests and brain imaging) to rule out other causes of dementia-like symptoms

Having problems remembering things does not necessarily mean that a person has Alzheimer's. Many other health issues cause problems with memory and thinking. This is why it's important to seek advice from a medical professional if you suspect you or a loved one may have Alzheimer's disease.

9 Alzheimer Society of Canada, <http://www.alzheimer.ca/en/About-dementia/Dementias/What-is-dementia/Facts-about-dementia>

10 Alzheimer Society of Canada, <http://www.alzheimer.ca/en/About-dementia/Dementias/What-is-dementia/Facts-about-dementia>

How Best Doctors can help

An increased risk of injuries and age-related diseases is an inextricable part of aging. Whether you're looking to confirm a bone fracture diagnosis before proceeding with treatment or want a specialist's opinion on a diagnosis of an age-related disease such as Alzheimer's, we're here to help. Working alongside your treating physician, we can give you the information and reassurance you need, helping you take control of your health. We may also be able to recommend treatment options to help manage your condition and reduce symptoms, helping ensure your golden years are truly golden.



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