



# Is safe footwear a thing?

## Falls, footwear and older adults

NHMRC Falls Prevention Partnership Project

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### Background

As the population ages, falls are increasing costs for health services worldwide. Footwear has often been implicated in falls. This study investigated older people's indoor and outdoor footwear preferences, why they chose particular footwear, together with their falls history.

### Method

A two-wave, state-wide mixed methods survey of community dwelling older adults was undertaken. There were 245 participant responses to the survey.

### Results

Participants reported footwear most commonly worn indoors was enclosed slippers (n=110, 45%), and outdoors was walking shoes (n=114, 47%). There was no association between slippers or any other indoor or outdoor footwear types chosen by participants and falls. Comfort was the most common reason for indoor and outdoor footwear choice. Safety was the second most reported reason for outdoor footwear choice but reported less frequently for indoor wear.

### Conclusion

For footwear to be part of falls prevention strategy in the future, comfort and safety should be considered.

**Table 1 - Footwear worn by participants, Indoor and Outdoor (n>245 as participants had more than one choice)**

Footwear Type	Worn Indoor, n=245	Worn Outdoor, n=245	
Slippers	Enclosed	110 (45%)	0
	Backless	42 (17%)	0
Socks	49 (20%)	0	
Bare feet	48 (20%)	0	
Sandals	44 (18%)	69 (28%)	
Walking Shoes	40 (16%)	114 (47%)	
Moccasins	24 (10%)	0	
Low heeled court	20 (8%)	48 (20%)	
Orthopaedic shoes	19(8%)	36 (15%)	
Thongs	11(4%)	4 (2%)	
Boots	5 (2%)	25 (10%)	
High heeled shoes	0	7 (3%)	
Other footwear types†	6 (2%)	3 (1%)	

†Includes Ugg® boots, croc-style and stockings. As respondents could specify more than one style of footwear, these percentages add to >100%.

**Table 2 - Reasons for footwear choice, Indoor and Outdoor**

Reason for choice	Indoor footwear, n=245	Outdoor footwear, n=245
Comfort	159 (65%)	163 (67%)
Other†	32 (13%)	19 (7.5%)
Ease of donning/doffing	24 (10%)	9 (4%)
Safety	15 (6%)	25 (10.2%)
Temperature related	10 (5%)	2 (1%)
Support/Balance	5 (2%)	13 (5%)
How they look	0	13 (5%)
Cost	0	1 (0.3%)

†Includes habit, health professional recommendation, self-motivated change, family influence, foot pain/pathology, convenience, cleanliness, features of footwear liked, don't like wearing footwear and only pair owned.

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