

Stay Steady – Stay Independent

Patient and Carer Advice on Preventing Falls

Avoiding a fall helps to maintain independence and confidence in daily activities, and may prevent an injury and possible hospital admission.

Keeping as fit and active as possible is an important part of falls prevention. This information pack contains suggestions to help you reduce the risk of falling. We hope you find the information helpful.

Managing your Medicines

The side effects of some of your medicines (e.g. dizziness, drowsiness, low blood pressure) may make you liable to fall. Please ask your GP to review your medications if you are having problems.

If you have difficulty in taking your tablets or remembering what to take when, this can also lead to problems. Your Pharmacist can help by giving you a Medicines Reminder Chart, or you can have them dispensed into a daily dosing box. Your Pharmacist can also advise you about possible side effects from the medicines.

Special groups of medicines to watch out for:

Medicines to lower blood pressure and some heart medications can cause dizziness. Take care to sit up or stand up slowly. Mention the problem to your GP.

Water tablets will make you want to go to the toilet more frequently. Don't rush to the toilet as it may cause you to trip and fall. Leave a light on at night to see your way.

Medicines to help you sleep can sometimes make you feel drowsy or confused in the morning. If this is a concern tell your GP. Take time to get your balance if you get up in the night.

General Tips

- Only take medicines prescribed for you
- If you forget your prescribed medicine do not take two doses next time. Contact your Pharmacist for advice if you miss a dose.
- Make sure you know how and when to take each medicine by reading the medication leaflets.
- Make sure you store your medicine properly.
- Be sure to finish each course of treatment.
- Don't flush unused medicines down the toilet. Return them to your Pharmacist for disposal.
- Check with your Doctor or Pharmacist before taking over the counter and prescribed medicines at the same time.



Eating for Health

Remember, food is important to maintain muscle strength and strong bones. You need to maintain a healthy balanced diet and eat enough food to prevent unplanned weight loss. Consuming enough calcium and vitamin D is important for good bone health.

Good calcium foods are:

- Milk (1 portion = 1 glass)
- Cheese (1 portion = approx 2oz or 40 grams)
- Milk based foods (1 portion = 1 carton/bowl) E.g. Yoghurt, custard, milk pudding
- Tinned fish with bones (1 portion = 1/3 tin or 70 grams) - Eat the bones!

Choose 3 portions each day.

If you think you are not getting enough calcium in your diet you may need a calcium supplement. Ask your Dietician or GP for advice.

Vitamin D aids the absorption of calcium into bones. Vitamin D is produced by the action of sunlight on skin. Low levels of vitamin D are common in older people who are house bound. If you think you are not getting enough Vitamin D in your diet you may need a supplement. Ask your Dietician or GP for advice.

Increase Vitamin D levels by:

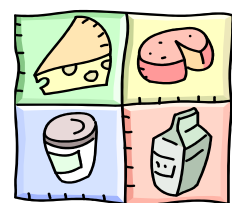
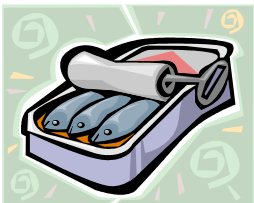
- Try to go outside for ½ hour each day between April and September to expose the skin to sunlight (Take care not to burn).
- Eat high vitamin D foods e.g. liver, oily fish (herrings, kippers, mackerel, sardines, tuna, salmon, and trout), breakfast cereals, margarine, and egg.

Remember, for all round good health; include a variety of foods from each group:

- Fruit and vegetables
- Starchy foods (bread, cereals and potatoes)
- Protein foods (meat, fish, eggs and lentils)
- Dairy food

It is also important to maintain good fluid levels. Aim to drink 6 – 10 cups of fluid per day e.g. water, tea or coffee.

If you are losing weight and/or have a poor appetite consult your Doctor.



Good Feet - Good Shoes

By paying attention to your feet and shoes you can help reduce the risk of a fall. The more active you are, the better your balance is likely to be. In order to keep your joints mobile and muscles strong, you need to be able to walk confidently and comfortably.

Good Feet

If you have a painful foot problem, arrange to see a Podiatrist / Chiropodist who is registered with the Health Professions Council (HPC). You may be eligible for NHS treatment. Ask your GP for advice. If you need to consult a private Podiatrist, always look for 'HPC Registered' after their name. Follow the advice they give you to keep your feet fit and pain free.



Good Shoes



Invest in a good pair of shoes for everyday wear – even if you spend much of your time indoors. Here are some tips for choosing good footwear:

- Check you have the right shoe size. Cramped feet don't allow you to walk naturally;
- Avoid slip on shoes or sandals with a sling back making the ankle unstable;
- Select shoes that are shaped for the human foot, preferably ones that have rounded toes and soft leather uppers and are of adequate length, width and depth;
- Look for low, wide heeled shoes with a firm back to make the ankle stable;
- Laces, buckles, velcro or broad straps give the best support. If your feet swell, adjust the fastening during the day;
- Check the laces are tied properly and don't trail along the floor causing you to trip;
- Be wary of deeply ridged soles - they could catch on uneven surfaces;
- Be wary of smooth shiny soles - they could send you sliding;
- Look for a flexible but hardwearing sole;
- Avoid walking around the house in nylon tights or stockings - it's easy to slip or step on a sharp object;
- Put on bedroom slippers if you get up in the night - a Velcro tab is quick and easy to fasten and holds the foot securely;
- Watch out for trailing hems of trousers and long nighties;
- Keep your shoes in good repair and throw out any with badly worn heels or those that are loose and sloppy.

Home Safety Check

- Make sure your furniture is arranged so that you have enough space to walk safely, especially if you use a walking aid.
- Make sure you can easily reach your windows and curtains without overstretching.
- Ensure that the carpet is in good repair. Secure edges with strong tape. Mats and rugs can cause slips and falls, remove them or use strong double sided tape or non-slip backing to avoid them slipping.
- Always keep objects off the floor.
- Make sure your outside door is easy to open.
- Consider purchasing a wire basket to fit over the letterbox to catch your post so you don't have to bend.
- If you have milk delivered consider a tall milk bottle holder.
- Keep emergency numbers in large print next to each telephone.
- Use non-slip matting in areas likely to get wet such as by the sinks, washing machine and fridge.



Steps and Stairs

- Keep the stairs well-lit and use additional lighting if you only have a light switch at the top or bottom of the stairs
- Make sure stair rails are fitted on both sides if possible and are as long as the stairs.
- Avoid carrying anything with two hands such as a tray or walking aid on the stairs.
- Do not stack items on the stairs
- Make sure any loose or broken steps are repaired.
- Ensure the carpet is firmly attached to each step, or remove carpet and use non-slip rubber treads.

Lounge

- Check that small items of furniture such as tables or footstools are not in your way.
- Avoid leaving anything on your floor especially newspapers or glossy magazines.
- Your usual chair should be secure, so that it does not move when you sit down but is easy to get out of.
- A television remote control will save you from bending down to change channels.

Kitchen

- Arrange things in your cupboards to minimise bending and lifting.
- Keep things you use often in easy reach locations.
- Carrying food and drink into another room is often difficult especially if you use a walking aid. Consider using a tall trolley.
- Never use a chair as a step stool
- If you must use a step stool, get one with a firm and secure base and a bar or rail to hold onto,



Bedroom

- Your bed should be of a good height for you to get in and out of easily.
- Try to take your time getting out of bed to adjust your balance.
- If you need to go to the toilet in the night, make sure the route to the bathroom is well-lit and free of obstacles.
- Sometimes a commode or urine bottle kept by the bedside may be useful.
- Make sure there is a lamp or light close to the bed that you can turn on before you get out.
- When you get out of bed, make sure you tuck any trailing sheets or covers away so you don't trip whilst moving round the bed area.



Bathroom

- Well-placed grab rails can make it easier for you to get in and out of the bath or shower
- Rails can also help you to get on and off the toilet safely.
- A non-slip bath mat or self-stick strips are useful in the bath and shower to help you keep your footing secure when standing up.
- A stool or chair in the bathroom is useful so you can sit down to dry yourself.
- Do not lock the bathroom door, in case someone needs to come in to help you.



Lighting and Wiring

- Keep the stairs and living areas well-lit at all times.
- Keep a torch by your bed and if possible on each level of your home to reduce the risk of falling if a power cut occurs.
- Coil or tape electrical flexes, wires and telephone cords next to the wall so you can't trip over them
- Try to organise things so your appliances are close to a socket.
- Do not run cables across a room.

Telephone

- Do not hurry to answer the telephone. Rushing will make you more likely to trip or lose balance
- If you miss the call you can dial 1471 to hear the telephone number of the last caller.
- Position a chair next to the telephone to avoid having to stand.
- Consider a cordless telephone, which you can carry with you, and /or a telephone by your bed.
- A pendant alarm is worth considering for peace of mind, this enables you to summon help if you fell and are unable to get up.



Outside

- Keep paths swept clear of leaves. Try to keep them in good repair.
- Moss and algae become very slippery when wet so make sure your paving stones are kept free.
- White or yellow paint on the edge of a step can make it easier to see and improve your awareness of it.
- Make sure your washing line is not too high, and where you walk is level and safe.
- Avoid taking rubbish to the dustbin if the weather is bad.
- If you go out in icy weather, spread salt or grit on your pathways first.
- Never use a ladder when you are on your own.
- If you have a high step to get in and out of your home, consider having an additional step installed and a grab rail.



Exercise

As you get older it is important to be as active as you can. Regular physical activity will help you maintain strength, flexibility and energy levels so you can carry on doing the things you enjoy and stay independent.

There are many daily activities that will keep you fit and healthy. Try taking a brisk walk for example or some gardening or dancing. It is never too late to start and you can build up very gradually. Reducing the amount you move about can actually make you more prone to falling as your muscles become weaker and your balance declines.

Even healthy older people lose 1 – 2% of their strength per year; this natural decline in strength can dramatically increase following illness or surgery so it is important to build in regular exercise to everyday routines.

Stay Active to Stay Independent

Keeping fit and healthy will help you to stay mobile and independent. It is **never too late** to take up some form of exercise to improve your suppleness and strength. If you don't get much exercise at present, it is a good idea to start gently. Consult your GP if you have any concerns about your health.

It is important to get a mix of exercise that increases general fitness, strength and balance. If you need help starting you will find information at your local leisure centre, health centre, Library, AgeUK office or through your GP.

Here are a few important points to remember:

- Set realistic and achievable targets e.g. 2 x 10 minute walk a day.
- Build up gradually and listen to your body.
- Don't exercise if you are tired, unwell or have just eaten.
- Wear loose clothing and soft-soled supportive shoes.
- Remember to breathe properly. Don't hold your breath while doing any movement.
- Exercise should not cause pain. If it does, STOP.
- It is not unusual to feel a bit stiff and tired after the first few periods of exercise. If this continues, consult your GP.
- If you feel any dizziness, nausea, pain, cold sweats or excessive stiffness or tiredness, stop exercising immediately and consult your GP.

Don't let a previous fall or fear of falling put you off doing some exercise – Exercise that makes your legs stronger WILL help to prevent future falls.

What to do if you fall

It is important to think about what you would do if you fell before it actually happens. This will help you to plan how you would cope in that situation. Consider how you would summon help if you fell. Perhaps an alarm system such as 'Lifeline' which you can use to call for assistance may be something you could install. Alarm systems work via a pendant which is linked to the telephone. Contact your local council for further information.

If you do not want an alarm system, consider how you would reach a telephone. Having handsets in more than one room may help. Keeping a walking stick or other sturdy item at a reachable level from the floor might be useful for banging loudly on a wall. Ensuring that a blanket is reachable from the floor in the event that you cannot get up and need to keep warm is also a good idea.

Here are some basic points to remember in the event that you do fall:

1. Try to stay calm and don't panic

2. Get help if you can

- Don't move if you feel pain
- Try to attract attention – bang on the wall or floor as loudly as you can or use your alarm if you have one.
- Call 999 if you can reach a telephone

3. If you can't get help and you are not hurt, try to get up

- First, check carefully that you are not hurt
- Only if you are not hurt, roll onto your hands and knees and crawl to a sturdy piece of furniture – for example a bed or chair
- Put your hands on the chair or bed and bring one leg up, bending your knee and placing foot flat on the floor.
- Lean forwards, pushing with your hands and foot and bring your other foot up so that it is also flat on the floor and you are crouching
- Turn and sit on the furniture
- Make sure you rest for a while before you try to stand up

Once you know the technique it is a good idea to practise doing this before it ever happens.

4. If you are hurt or you can't get up, keep yourself warm

- Cover yourself with a blanket, coat or other warm fabric that you can reach
- Keep tensing your arm and leg muscles and roll from side to side if you can to keep moving
- If you have fallen on a hard floor, try and crawl to a softer, carpeted area
- Keep trying to attract attention

If you have any queries please contact:

Falls Prevention Service

Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust

01423 885959

Adapted with kind permission of East Cambridgeshire and Fenland PCT.

Produced Nov 2007

Approved by Patient Information and Communication Group (PICG) 08/11/2007

Author- Falls Service Co-ordinator

Last review September 2015

If you require this information in an alternative language or format (such as Braille, audiotape or large print), please ask the staff who are looking after you.