

# Preventing falls: strategies for staying on your feet

Information for patients, relatives and carers



The information in this booklet is in enlarged text.

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## In this booklet

This booklet has useful information about how we can all **think, plan** and **act** to reduce the risk of falls in our homes, the hospital, and in the community.

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## We would like your feedback

Tell us what you think about this booklet by completing our short survey.

Scan the QR code or visit: <https://forms.office.com/r/VzU2B6LMgf>



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## General information

### Frequently asked questions about falls and fall-related injuries

Falls and fall-related injuries are increasingly common. Whether it be for yourself, a loved one, or someone you care for, understanding falls is very important when it comes to preventing them.

#### ? Who is at risk of having a fall?

All of us are at risk of having a fall, but the risk increases as we age. Approximately one third of people aged over 65 will have a fall within a year. Fortunately, many falls can be prevented with simple measures.

#### ? Why is it more common for older people to fall?

As we get older, our ability to react when we over-reach or trip on something can decrease.

Falls can be more serious when we age as there is a higher risk of injury or fractures caused by lower bone density.

After a fall it is common for people to lose confidence which can reduce a person's activity levels and have a wide range of unintended effects such as muscle wasting and decreased balance.

In our lifetime, we may also have various medical conditions which can increase the risk of having a fall. This risk increases when these conditions are not diagnosed or are untreated.





## **What can I do to reduce my risk of having a fall?**

There are lots of things that you can do to help lower your chance of having a fall.

Keeping as active as possible is important to maintain muscle strength. Other measures include reviewing your home to make sure it is free of hazards and following the falls prevention advice when in hospital or the community.

There is information, checklists and activities at the end of this booklet which can help you think about how you can prevent falls.

## **What to do if you or someone else falls**

Please read the advice below to learn how to manage a fall for yourself or someone else.

**If you have fallen and you are able to get up:** Contact your GP or call NHS 111. You may be advised to visit an urgent care centre to have a falls review. If the injuries from the fall are significant, call 999.

**If you have fallen and cannot move or are in significant pain:** Call out for help or press your pendant alarm if available to get support. If you can access a telephone, call 999. Wait for a professional to come and see you. They will advise you on what to do next.

**If someone else has fallen:** Never try to lift a person up off the ground. This could mean that you fall as well or cause yourself an injury. Raise the alarm or call 999 to seek help from a professional.

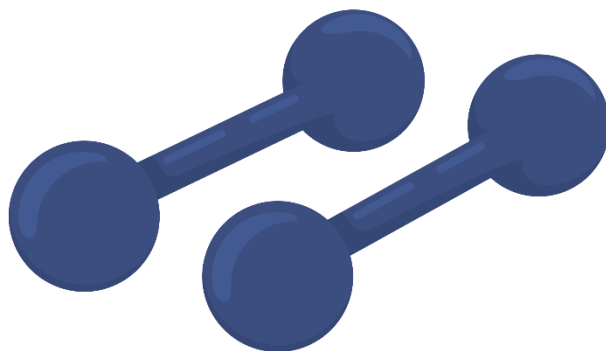
**If you have gone to hospital because of a fall:** It is important to talk about it in detail with a healthcare professional. Having one fall makes it more likely you will have another fall within the year. However, there are likely to be some simple adjustments that can be made to prevent falls and keep you steady on your feet.

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## Why falls happen

### Changes in mobility

Our muscle strength can decrease if we are less active. Between the ages of 50 and 70, people tend to lose about 30 per cent of their muscle mass which can make it hard to keep feeling strong on our feet. Exercise is a good way of helping to maintain muscle strength. There are lots of different exercises that you can do. Speak to a healthcare professional for exercise ideas that can be tailored to you or look at the resource section at the end of this booklet.



### Experts recommend

Over 65's should do muscle strengthening exercises at least twice a week. Consider going to an exercise class – which has the benefits of both fitness and making friends.

Everyone should be active for at least 30 minutes, five times per week. Some ideas include gardening, walking outdoors, cleaning the house, or for those who have reduced walking ability, consider chair-based exercises.

### Tip

Having your balance assessed by a physiotherapist can help to determine if you will benefit from having a walking aid. A referral to see a physiotherapist can be made in hospital, or through your GP, and in some boroughs you can make a self-referral.

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## Foot health

Painful feet can impact your mobility. Have regular foot check-ups to keep your feet healthy.



A referral to a chiropodist if your feet are causing you any issue could be helpful.

Some people experience reduced sensation in their feet, which can be a problem when walking. Make sure you mention this to a doctor if this is a problem for you.

### Experts recommend

Choosing shoes that fit well and are suitable for your activities.

Use high-sided, thin-soled footwear with a good grip to give you extra stability.

Replace slippers that are loose, worn out, or that have no backs around your heels.

### Tip

If you are unsure if your foot sensation is as good as it should be, you can have someone test this.

Tracing the lid of a pen on the soles of the foot can be an easy way to do this. Can you feel this with your eyes open and closed?

## Sensory changes

Our senses work together to provide us with information which help us understand our surroundings. Our senses are also vital in creating and coordinating movement.

## Experts recommend

Having your eye sight checked every year (it's free for the over-60s), and telling your doctor about any changes to your vision.

Telling a healthcare professional if you experience dizziness, or if you can't hear as well as you used to. You may need your hearing checked, or the cause of the dizziness looked into.

Working on your balance through targeted exercises can help to build and maintain the balance system.

## Tip

Take extra care if you need to use bifocal or varifocal lenses as these can affect how you perceive objects, distances, and heights.

## Confusion and disorientation

People can get confused for lots of reasons. Whether it's new or longstanding, confusion can increase the risk of falls.

If this is a problem for you, it is best to seek advice from a healthcare professional.



Let your GP or the hospital team know so that they can work with you to identify ways to make things safer. This may require some medical and routine questions about memory, or some changes to the environment if this will help with orientation.

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## Mood and coping with pain

Mood a factor which can impact on your chances of having a fall. If a person has had a fall before, it is understandable for them to be worried about having another one. Fear of falling can stop people doing their usual activities, leading to reduced fitness, low mood and isolation.



### Experts recommend

Speaking to family, a caregiver or a professional if low mood or motivation is impacting you or a loved one.

Speaking to a professional for advice if pain is an issue which is affecting mood or confidence.

### Tip

Never give or take prescription pain medications that aren't prescribed- this can cause a wide range of side effects, which may result in a fall.

## Health conditions

Health conditions can be a cause of falls, with cardiovascular disease accounting for many unexplained falls.

It is common for people to develop different health conditions during their lives. It is very important to have regular check-ups to manage your overall health as most conditions are treatable and manageable.



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## Multiple medications

More health conditions can mean more medications. Having four or more medications can increase the risk of falling, with some medications being associated with side effects such as dizziness, sleepiness or a drop in blood pressure when standing, resulting in light-headedness, falls and blackouts. This is known as postural or orthostatic hypotension. Healthcare professionals may test the blood pressure in different positions to check for this condition.



Blood pressure dropping can also be due to illness, dehydration, heat, alcohol, and digestion.

### Experts recommend

If you are taking four or more medications, making sure you have a medication check by your GP at least once a year or sooner if in hospital.

If you are taking a blood pressure medication, having your blood pressure checked at least twice a month within the community, for example a pharmacy or GP.

Making sure to take all your regular medications on schedule. Consider using a dosette box which has labelled sections for each day, or a blister pack to arrange your medications so you can keep track of what you are taking.

### Tip

Speaking to a healthcare professional if you have concerns about your blood pressure, or if you have noticed that you feel dizzy sometimes when you stand up.

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## Nutrition and vitamin D

Good nutrition is very important, whatever your age. Not getting enough vitamins and minerals can be a recipe for poor health and is linked with higher rates of falls due to muscle loss.



### Experts recommend

Getting a balanced diet which includes calcium rich foods such as dairy products.

You should try to get plenty of sunlight to allow for good bone health. If you continue to experience muscle loss, a supplement for bone health may be needed, or referral to a dietician could be useful.

Trying to make sure that you also have plenty of protein rich meals such as those containing meat, beans, and dairy; these can help to keep muscles strong.

### Tip

People who aren't able to go outside often are more likely to have vitamin D deficiency so extra care is needed to make sure these individuals have enough vitamin D.

## Hydration

Drinking plenty of water is key to making sure all our bodily functions are working as well as they can. Not enough water can negatively

impact our organs such as our kidneys, make it difficult for our bowels to work normally, and be a main cause of dizziness which can result in a fall.



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## Experts recommend

Individuals have the right amount of water for their needs. Certain medical conditions can mean we need more or less water than others.

Taking caution with alcohol use, this can mix with medications, dehydrate, and lower reaction times in the event of a fall.

## Tip

Speak to the GP or a healthcare professional if you have noticed any new swelling of the legs or body- this could be a sign of a person having too much water or a medical problem.

## Bladder and bowel issues

Incontinence is linked to falls, whether it be rushing to the toilet, having an accident which may cause a slip, or needing to get up a lot at night.



## Experts recommend

Speaking to a healthcare professional if you have noticed new changes with the bladder or bowels, this could be a health problem in disguise.

Considering ways to keep night-time toileting safe: for example, sensor lights and use of equipment such as a commode or a urine bottle can help.

Keeping track of bodily functions as it is important to know what the body is doing!

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## Reducing risk of falls in hospital

### Making the hospital experience as safe as possible

In this section of this booklet, there are some hospital specific tips which have been co-designed by staff, patients and their care givers, which aims to make your hospital stay as safe as possible.



Inform a staff member if you have fallen before or if you are fearful of falling.



Use the call bell to let staff know if you need help.



Request to use your usual walking aid. Tell staff if you feel dizzy or lightheaded before trying to get up.



Ask a staff member to show you around the ward as navigating new or unfamiliar environments is a common contributor to falls.



Keep personal items close by. If items have been stored away, please ask us to locate them so they are within reach.



Wear well fitted footwear or non-slip socks – hospital floors can be slippery.



Tell staff if you have stairs at home and you are worried about climbing these once you leave hospital.



Bed rails may be suitable for some, but not for all. They should only be used following clinical assessment by a healthcare professional. If you are concerned about your own or your family member's safety in the bed, please discuss this with staff.

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## Identifying hospital hazards

There are at least 8 hazards in this picture which could cause a fall or an injury.

**Can you name them?** (Answers on page 21)



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## Reducing risk of falls at home and in the community

### Is fear of falling stopping you?

Having concerns or worries about falling is common and understandable - especially after having a fall. But if you keep feeling concerned, this can have negative consequences. For instance, you might start to avoid certain activities or go outdoors less, which could worsen your balance.

It is important to discuss any concerns that you may have with a healthcare practitioner such as a GP or a physiotherapist. This can help you address and reduce any concerns you may have.

We consider these questions to help us understand more about falls:

#### 1. Have you fallen in the past year?

Yes ☐ No ☐

#### 2. Do you feel unsteady when standing or walking?

Yes ☐ No ☐

#### 3. Do you have worries about falling?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If the answer is **yes** to one or more of these questions for yourself or for someone you care for, rate the following pictures using the scale.





1

Not at all  
concerned



2

Somewhat  
concerned



3

Fairly  
concerned

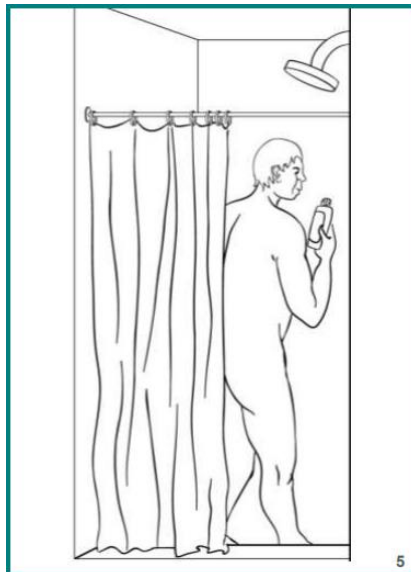


4

Very  
concerned



Getting dressed



Taking a shower



Taking a bath



Reaching for something above your head



Reaching for something above your head



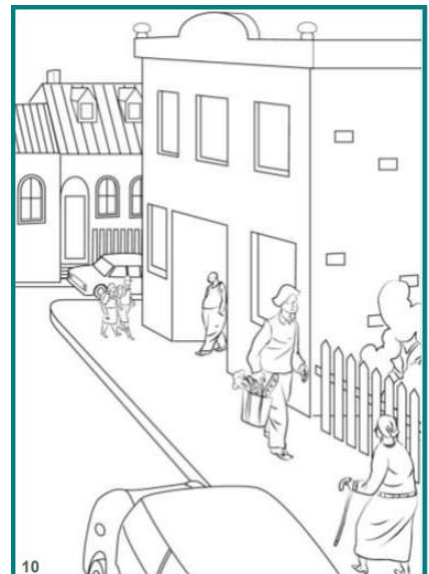
Going out to a social event



Going down the stairs



Going to the shop



Walking around in the neighbourhood

*ICON- FES used with permission from: Delbaere, K. Neuroscience Research Australia*

How concerned do the following activities make you feel?

If you score “somewhat concerned” or higher on more than three scenarios, we recommend speaking with an occupational therapist, physiotherapist or your GP.



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## Word Find

M	O	B	I	L	I	T	Y	L	K
C	R	T	F	A	L	L	W	Q	E
C	M	H	E	A	L	T	H	D	K
M	E	D	I	C	A	T	I	O	N
H	A	Z	A	R	D	S	C	P	E
U	R	G	V	I	S	I	O	N	N
T	Q	R	M	M	Y	M	Q	Z	E
C	O	N	F	U	S	I	O	N	R
D	B	H	E	A	R	I	N	G	G
I	E	X	E	R	C	I	S	E	Y

Medication

Confusion

Hearing

Mobility

Fall

Energy

Vision

Exercise

Health

Hazards

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## Reducing the risk of falls in the home

Most causes of falls are preventable, with the risk of falling in the home being significantly reduced with environmental checks.

### Check today:

☐

Is the home free from excess clutter?

☐

Are there clear walkways with no furniture in the way?

☐

Are rugs/mats removed or secured?

☐

Are cords and wires out of the way so there is no need to step over them?

☐

Are general items within reach e.g. in the kitchen and bathroom?

☐

Are the rooms well lit and a night sensor light available?

☐

Is there a falls alarm/phone to call for help if is needed?

☐

Are there rails or banisters along the stairs or steep steps?

Following a fall, an occupational therapist may visit your home. The therapist can prescribe equipment which can help to make things easier on a day-to-day basis such as chairs for the shower, door handles or a falls alarm.

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## Goal setting to prevent falls

We recommend making 3 short term goals related to physical activity or preventing falls. You may like to use the advice in this booklet to structure your goals.

With any increase in physical activity, it is best to do this under the guidance of a professional to prevent injury.

1

Within \_\_\_\_\_, I will \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2

Within \_\_\_\_\_, I will \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3

Within \_\_\_\_\_, I will \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## Further information

### Helpful resources:

Speak to a GP about community exercise classes in your local borough

<b>AGE UK</b>	Can support with active aging	0800 169 6565 <a href="http://www.ageuk.org.uk/">www.ageuk.org.uk/</a>
<b>AGE UK</b>	Setting up personal alarms	0800 011 3846 <a href="http://www.ageuk.org.uk/alarm">www.ageuk.org.uk/alarm</a>
<b>Chartered Society of Physiotherapy</b>	A visual guide to getting up after a fall	<a href="http://www.csp.org.uk/system/files/publication_files/001728_Fall%20Proof%21A4%20Download_V3.pdf">www.csp.org.uk/system/files/publication_files/001728_Fall%20Proof%21A4%20Download_V3.pdf</a>
<b>Falls Assistant</b>	A great website with lots of interactive falls education resources	<a href="http://www.fallsassistant.org.uk">www.fallsassistant.org.uk</a>
<b>NHS UK</b>	A tool to find a local exercise class near you	<a href="http://www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-health-services/fitness-activities-and-classes">www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-health-services/fitness-activities-and-classes</a>
<b>Keysafe Arc Life</b>	Can provide keysafes for order across London	<a href="http://www.keysafe.co.uk/">www.keysafe.co.uk/</a>
<b>Make Movement Your Mission</b>	A free daily exercise video found on YouTube- for most levels of ability	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLeePVUq4FvWu9uSwUK8YMwZIVjx1CKp8qUK">www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLeePVUq4FvWu9uSwUK8YMwZIVjx1CKp8qUK</a>
<b>NHS</b>	Exercises available online for building strength and flexibility	<a href="http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/strength-and-flexibility-exercises/how-to-improve-strength-flexibility/">www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/strength-and-flexibility-exercises/how-to-improve-strength-flexibility/</a>

<b>NHS</b>	Online directory for where to get a blood pressure test in England	<a href="http://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/pharmacies/find-a-pharmacy-that-offers-free-blood-pressure-checks/">www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/pharmacies/find-a-pharmacy-that-offers-free-blood-pressure-checks/</a>
<b>NHS</b>	Support for hearing impairment in England	<a href="http://www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-health-services/hearing-impairment-information-and-support">www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-health-services/hearing-impairment-information-and-support</a>
<b>Open Age</b>	Face-to-face strength and balance classes for Tri-Borough patients. Also offering virtual strength and balance classes	020 4516 9975  <a href="http://www.openage.org.uk/falls-prevention">www.openage.org.uk/falls-prevention</a>
<b>Red Cross</b>	Can help to rebuild confidence and provide short term assistance after leaving hospital	0208 944 0246  london_enquiries@redcross.org.uk  <a href="http://www.redcross.org.uk/get-help/get-support-at-home">www.redcross.org.uk/get-help/get-support-at-home</a>
<b>Royal Osteoporosis Society</b>	Information about Vitamin D and bone health	<a href="http://www.theros.org.uk/information-and-support/bone-health/vitamin-d-for-bones/">www.theros.org.uk/information-and-support/bone-health/vitamin-d-for-bones/</a>
<b>The Royal College of Physicians</b>	A range of resources regarding falls prevention strategies	<a href="http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/naif-resource-repository">www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/naif-resource-repository</a>
<b>The College of Optometrists</b>	Resources which explore falls, eye health and key optical topics	<a href="http://www.college-optometrists.org/category-landing-pages/falls">www.college-optometrists.org/category-landing-pages/falls</a>

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## Spot the Hazard – Answers

- |                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Blanket on floor – trip hazard | 2. Spilled water jug                      |
| 3. Walking aid away from chair    | 4. Low lamp – hazard                      |
| 5. Low chair height               | 6. Bed height too high                    |
| 7. Clutter on table               | 8. Limited circulation space/limited room |

Can you think of any other possible answers?

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## How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at [imperial.pals@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.pals@nhs.net)

The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street London W2 1NY

Email: [ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net](mailto:ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net)

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

## Alternative formats

This booklet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team: [imperial.communications@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.communications@nhs.net)

## Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: [www.imperial.nhs.uk](http://www.imperial.nhs.uk)

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