

Excellence in rural healthcare

Falls Prevention

Occupational Therapy

www.ulh.nhs.uk

Who is affected by falls?

Anyone can have a fall, but as your age increases you are more likely to fall, especially if you have a long-term health condition.

Falls are a common, but often an overlooked, cause of injury. Around one in three adults over 65 who live at home will have at least one fall a year. Approximately half of these will have more frequent falls.

Most falls do not result in serious injury. However, when injury does occur, such as a broken bone, it can cause a loss of confidence and independence.

Experts believe that the majority of falls could be prevented with some modest changes to our lifestyle and homes.

Falls prevention

There are many things we can do to help reduce our risk of falling. This booklet will provide you with tips on some simple lifestyle changes and tips to make your home safer.

Getting around

The way we walk around is very important for preventing falls.

Tips:

- Make sure you lift your feet off the ground fully when walking - shuffling increases your chance of falling.
- Try not to carry things in your hands while moving around - use a rucksack.
- Take your time - rushing makes you more likely to trip.
- Watch out for any trip hazards such as uneven floor or pavement.
- Watch out for thresholds and mats when entering a building or a room.
- When coming in from outside or moving between rooms allow your eyes time to adjust.
- Don't be afraid to ask the bus driver to wait until you are in your seat before he pulls away and sit in a seat which is as near the exit as possible.
- Regular activity is important - consider taking frequent walks indoors and outdoors.

Walking Aids:

- Make sure you have the most appropriate mobility aid for you. A physiotherapist will be able to help by assessing your individual needs.
- If you use a stick, make sure that it has been correctly measured for you to ensure that it is safe and comfortable to use.
- Make sure that the stick has a rubber end (ferrule) which is in good condition and replace if worn.

Exercises for strength and balance

Doing regular strength and balance exercises can improve your strength and balance and reduce your risk of having a fall. This can take the form of simple exercise such as walking or dancing or a specialist training programme.

By completing the following exercises two or three times a week, you should soon notice an improvement in your co-ordination and balance.

- Make sure your chair is sturdy
- Wear supportive shoes
- A light soreness a day after is quite normal
- If you experience chest pain, dizziness or severe shortness of breath stop and call your GP or 111.

Heel Raises

Stand tall, holding the back of a sturdy chair or kitchen sink, lift your heels off the floor, taking the weight onto your big toes. Hold for three seconds, then lower with control. Repeat 10 times.



Toe Raises

Stand tall, holding the same support, then raise your toes, taking the weight on your heels. Don't stick your bottom out. Hold for three seconds, then lower with control. Repeat 10 times.



Sit to Stand

Sit tall, at the front of the chair. Place your feet slightly behind your knees and lean forwards a little and stand up slowly. Use the arms of the chair, if needed, but progress to doing this with no support from your hands, if able. Stand up tall and use your walking aid for balance once stood if needed. Bend your knees gently and lower yourself into the chair, place your hands back onto the arms of the chair if needed. Repeat 10 times.



Heel-Toe Stand

Stand tall with one hand on your support. Put one foot directly in front of the other to make a straight line. Look ahead, take your hand off the support and balance for 10 seconds. Take the front foot back to hip width apart. Then place the other foot in front and balance for 10 seconds.

Heel-Toe Walking

Stand tall with one hand on a support like a kitchen worktop. Look ahead and walk 10 steps forwards placing one foot directly in front of the other, so the feet are in a straight line. Aim for a steady walking action. Take feet back to hip width apart and turn around. Repeat the steps in the other direction.

One-Leg Stand

Stand close to your support and hold it with one hand. Balance on one leg, keeping support and your posture upright. Hold the position for 10 seconds. Repeat on the other leg 10 times.

Footwear

Getting the right footwear can increase your chances of preventing a fall. Here are some things to bear in mind when choosing your footwear.

- Soles should have a good grip and low heel.
- Shoes should have high sides and back - no slip-ons or flip flops.
- A good fastening is important - Velcro fastenings are easy to use and are an effective alternative to laces.
- Shoes which are well cushioned provide good support.
- Slippers still need to be sturdy with a good sole and high back.

Taking care of your feet

Problems with your feet can impact on your balance making you more likely to have a fall.

- Trim your toenails on a regular basis - straight across and not too short to avoid ingrown nails.
- See your GP if you have tingling, swollen or painful feet which are stopping you from getting around easily.
- If you have trouble with foot care due to difficulty reaching your toes, you may wish to visit a podiatrist or arrange for them to visit you at home.

Vision and hearing

Both hearing and vision play an important role in your movement and your balance. Taking care of your eyesight and your hearing is vital. Here are some tips to help increase your chances of staying on your feet.

- Make sure to have your eyes tested regularly even if you think that your sight is fine. Once a year is the minimum we would recommend.
- If you wear glasses get your prescription reviewed on a regular basis.
- Clean the lenses of your glasses daily.
- If you use varifocal or bifocal glasses then it may make objects seem closer to you than they are increasing your risk of falling. Ask for advice from your optician.
- Go to see your GP if you have any hearing difficulties.

Medication

Medications which you are taking can make you experience dizziness or feel faint increasing the risk that you will have a fall. Multiple medications and some pain medications put you at a higher risk of falls.

- Make sure that you review your medications regularly with your GP - at least every 12 months.
- If you are over 75 or take 4 or more medications then you should review every 6 months with your GP.
- Alcohol can change the way that your body interacts with medications. Check the labels of all medication to see if there are any effects such as drowsiness which could affect your balance.

Continence

Being incontinent can increase your risk of falling. This is because you may be rushing to get to the toilet. There is no need to be embarrassed as 3 to 6 million people over 60 have urinary incontinence problems.

- Talk to a continence nurse - you can ask to be referred by your GP or another healthcare professional.
- If you are rushing in the dark, consider having a touch lamp by your bed.
- Ask your occupational therapist to see if there is equipment which can be provided to reduce the risk.
- Some continence medication can also make you dizzy, increasing your risk of falling even more. Make sure that your healthcare professionals are aware.
- Try to use the toilet regularly to reduce the risk of falling if rushing to the toilet.

Pain

Being in pain can increase your chance in falling because your body will respond to the pain in different ways. If you have ongoing pain you are less likely to be active and move around enough to keep your body active. This can make you feel worse when you move around after a long period of staying still and increase your chance of falling. Pain also has emotional impacts which can make you feel distressed.

- Seek your GP's advice on how best to manage your pain.
- You may be referred to a pain clinic to consider how best to manage your pain.

Fear and anxiety

Fear of falling is very common, particularly if you have fallen in the past. However, spending long periods sitting down can also harm our ability to balance because it can make the muscles we use to stabilise ourselves get weaker. It can also make us weaker and reduce our mobility.

- Try not to avoid moving because you are afraid of falling.
- If you are watching television, try to get up and move your muscles during the advert break.
- Set yourself small, gradual goals.
- Try to maintain your social activities.
- Stay positive.
- Practice relaxation exercises for anxious moments.
- Learn and practice ways to get up if you should fall.
- Consider what you would do in an emergency.

Relaxation

Making time for activities which make you relax is important for preventing fear and anxiety.

- Talk to others about anything which might be worrying you.
- Find the relaxation tools which work for you.
- Try finding enjoyable activities which take your mind off worrying thoughts about falling.

Breathing exercises

This calming breathing technique for anxiety and panic takes just a few minutes and can be done anywhere.

You will get the most benefit if you do it regularly, as part of your daily routine.

You can do it standing up, sitting in a chair that supports your back, or lying on a bed.

Make yourself as comfortable as you can. If you can, loosen any clothes that restrict your breathing.

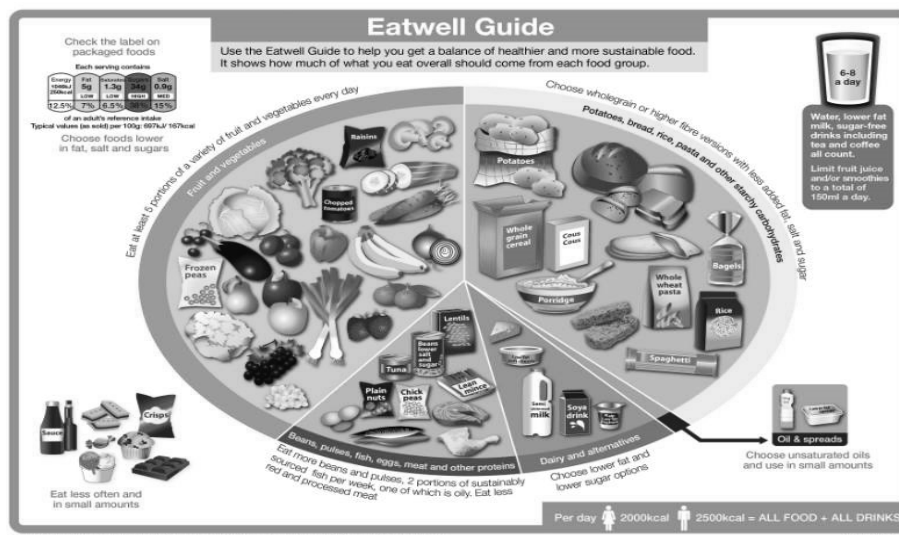
If you're sitting or standing, place both feet flat on the ground. Whatever position you're in, place your feet roughly hip-width apart.

- Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable, without forcing it.
- Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Breathe in gently and regularly. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from one to five. You may not be able to reach five at first.
- Then, without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting from one to five again, if you find this helpful.
- Keep doing this for three to five minutes.

Diet

Eating a healthy and balanced diet will provide you with the nutrients that your body needs to maintain energy levels and an increased sense of wellbeing. Here is some guidance on how you can achieve this.

- Drink plenty of fluids - mainly water and tea without sugar, or sugar free drinks. Reduce your coffee intake. Women should drink 1.5 litres/3 pints a day and men should drink 2 litres or 3.5 pints a day.
- Eat 5 fruit and vegetable portions every day.
- You should avoid drinking more than 2 to 3 units of alcohol 5 days a week.
- The picture below shows you how much of each food group you should try to eat.
- It is recommended that you eat regularly and do not skip meals.
- Your GP can give advice on healthy eating or refer you to a dietician for more advice.
- For a full size version of the "Eatwell guide" please go to www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/the-eatwell-guide.aspx



Environment

Stairs/steps

- Use the hand rail for support. Think about having a second hand rail fitted.
- Consider grab rails besides your steps/entrances.
- Place the whole of the foot on the step.
- Ascend the stairs using your 'good' leg leading, where appropriate.
- Descend the stairs with your 'bad' leg leading, where appropriate.
- Ensure your stairs and steps are clutter free.

Tripping hazards

- Remove any rugs or ensure they have a non-slip underlay.
- Replace worn or curled carpets or ask someone to tack them down.
- Avoid trailing cables.
- Consider a bell and/or a bright collar for your cat or dog to identify where they are.
- Clear away clutter, especially in the hall, landing, stairs and doorways.
- Clear up spills straight away.

Lighting

- Ensure there is good lighting, particularly on stairs.
- Consider the use of branch lighting to replace single bulbs so if the bulb blows you are not left in the dark.
- If you need to get up in the night use a torch or bedside light, which could be sensor activated.

Garden and access

- Keep paths free of moss and leaves.
- Repair any cracks in paving.
- Ensure your doors and garage are well lit.
- Consider installing safety rails on your steps.

Bending or reaching

- Re-arrange your cupboards so that frequently used items are within easy reach or keep things on your worktop.
- Avoid getting up too quickly and bending too low to avoid dizziness.
- Consider installing grab rails in the bathroom.
- Consider purchasing a 'grabber' to pick things up from the floor.
- Using a trolley to move laundry or food between rooms avoids having to bend to pick items up. You can be assessed for one of these by your occupational therapist.
- A letterbox cage avoids you having to bend down to pick up items.

Furniture

- The furniture that you sit on should ideally be the same height as your lower leg measurement (heel to the back of your knee). This will reduce your risk of falling. Your occupational therapist can provide you with equipment to raise your furniture.
- Be mindful to having large amounts of furniture in small areas such as hallways, this can increase the risk of falling and injuring yourself.
- Think about the positioning and height of coffee tables to avoid having to bend.
- Perching stools can be provided by your occupational therapist for fatigue. Ensure they are stored away from the main thoroughfare.
- Ensure brakes are applied to all wheeled equipment when in a stationary position.

Heating

- Check your home is warm.
- If you are using an electric blanket to keep warm, check it is in good condition and the cable is out of the way.
- If you are using throws and blankets, ensure you cannot trip over them.
- Keep your heating on a timer so that if you do fall and can't get up then you won't get cold.

Personal alarm

If you fall or are concerned about falling, a personal alarm lets you contact a 24 hour response centre or two nominated people at the touch of a button.

- Talk to your occupational therapist about information on telecare devices.
- Bed or chair sensors can detect if you have got up but not returned within a set time.
- Falls detectors can detect a sudden drop in height.

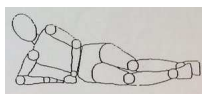
Other ways of preventing falls

- Keep telephones at a level that can be reached from the floor.
- Ask your neighbours to check on you if they don't see your curtains drawn by a certain time.

Getting up from a fall

If you fall lie still for a minute, stay calm and check for injuries. If you are unhurt and think you can get up, use the following steps to assist you. If you know you can't get up or feel pain in your hips or back, summon help. If you injure your head in the fall summon medical support.

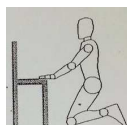
- 1) Roll on to your side, then push up on to your elbows



- 2) Use your arms to push yourself on to your hands and knees



- 3) Crawl to a stable piece of furniture (chair or bed) and hold onto it for support



- 4) Slide or raise the foot of your stronger leg forwards so it is flat on the floor



- 5) Lean forwards and push up using your arms and front leg, slowly rise to a standing position



- 6) Turn around and sit down. Rest for a minute or two

What to do if you are unable to get up from the floor

- Try to stay calm, you will probably feel a little shocked and shaken.
- Summon help by:
 - Pressing your pendant alarm
 - Using your phone
 - Shouting for help
 - Banging on the floor
- Try to keep warm by finding a blanket and moving around
- If possible move to a soft surface
- Try to keep uninjured limbs moving
- If you need to go to the toilet try and move away from the wet area and if possible remove any wet clothes

Further information

British Association of Occupational Therapy

Website: www.rcot.co.uk

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

Website: www.csp.org.uk

British Dietetic Association

Tel: 0121 200 80 80

Website: www.bda.uk.com

Public Health England

Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england

Disability parking badges

Website: www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge

Age UK Advice

Tel: 0800 1696565

Website: www.ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area/

Motability

Website: www.motability.co.uk

Contact details

If you have any other problems/queries please contact:

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Therapists work with people of all ages, helping them to carry out the activities they need to do in order to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

References

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet please email patient.information@ulh.nhs.uk

The Trust endeavours to ensure that the information given here is accurate and impartial.



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