

STEADY ON YOUR FEET

South Tees



Falls Prevention Information Pack

Information & Advice



Information and Advice

Falls

The more details you can remember about a fall, the easier it is to pinpoint a cause so think carefully about:

- When it happened – Was it related to time of day? Were you doing something specific at the time?
- How it happened – Was it a loss of balance? Did you trip on something? Did you go dizzy? Did you blackout?
- Where it happened – is there a trip hazard you could remove? Have you fallen in this place before? If so, why could this be?

Often, rather than one specific reason, there may be a number of underlying risk factors which have played a part, many of which can be reduced by following some simple advice.

These issues may include:

- Muscle weakness
- Poor balance
- Dizziness
- Environmental hazards
- Vision and hearing problems
- Foot pain, deformity or numbness
- Badly fitting or unsupportive footwear
- Memory loss or confusion
- Poor nutrition
- Medications
- Bladder and bowel conditions
- Alcohol consumption

Falling can have an impact on your confidence which may then lead to a vicious cycle of reduced activity and a further increase in falls risk.

Taking a pro-active approach, even if you haven't had a fall, will help you take control of the situation and allow you to remain active and independent for longer with an increased quality of life in the long term.

Blackouts

Blackouts can be difficult to identify, particularly if they are brief, but they should be suspected if you cannot recall the fall and / or have injuries to your face, as this suggests you did not put your hands out to save yourself.

Blackouts are very common and happen more often as we age. Common causes include:

- A drop in blood pressure when changing position (e.g. standing up from a chair)
- Heart disorders
- Anxiety / panic attacks / stress

If you think you may have had a blackout, it is important that you inform your GP so the cause can be investigated.

[More information can be found here](#)

Dizziness

It can occur for many reasons, e.g:

A drop in blood pressure when changing position (e.g. standing up from a chair)

- If you feel dizzy when you first stand up, change position slowly and exercise your arms and legs before rising
- Sit back down again if you feel dizzy and wait until it passes
- Stand still or walk on the spot when you first get up and don't rush

Dehydration

- Make sure you drink plenty of fluids during the day (6-8 cups per day)
- Drink regularly throughout the day
- Reduce caffeine and alcohol intake

Inner ear disorders / vertigo

- If you feel like the world is moving or spinning, or your dizziness is associated with nausea, vomiting, visual changes or hearing disturbances contact your GP surgery for further advice
- Ensure you have had a hearing assessment recently

Medications

- Discuss your symptoms with a community pharmacist if you are taking medication, particularly medication related to blood pressure

Medical conditions (e.g. diabetes, COPD)

- Consider whether your condition is well managed and discuss with a health professional if you need further advice

Anxiety

- Try some relaxation techniques such as mindfulness or deep breathing
- Discuss with your GP if severe

[NHS information on dizziness](#)

Medication

It is important to have your medications reviewed regularly by your GP or pharmacist so they can keep an eye on any side effects and alter dosage if necessary. This is particularly important as we age as our sensitivity can increase and dosages need to be adjusted accordingly.

Make sure you are taking your medications as prescribed by your GP. There may be specific instructions such as taking them at a certain time of day or on an empty stomach etc., that are important to the effectiveness. Check with your pharmacist if you plan on drinking alcohol or taking over the counter medication as these can have an effect on other medications you are taking.

[Help from a Pharmacist](#)

Environment

Often this is because of hazards within the home or difficulty with daily activities such as getting in / out of bed, on / off a chair or toilet, or in / out of the bath may also cause falls.

Falls prevention in and around the home is often described as 'common sense', however, it isn't always easy to recognise the things that can cause trips, slips and falls. Use our home safety section to help you identify and remove hazards within your home.

Use our [home safety section](#) to help you identify and remove hazards within your home

[View Home Safety](#)

Movement and Exercise

Between the ages of 50 and 70 we lose about 30% of our muscle strength and, as we age, our balance reaction times get slower which makes it harder to stay steady, especially if we are doing something quickly. Without physical activity, it is also difficult to maintain strong bones.

There is strong evidence that strength and balance exercise programmes are effective in preventing falls, regardless of age. Exercise classes designed for older people are particularly beneficial as they aim to improve balance and strength, making it easier to get in and out of chairs, on and off buses and up from and down to the floor.

[Click here for some strength and balance exercises to get you started](#)

Generally speaking, physical activity is any movement that results in a small increase in your heart rate and breathing. Exercising is safe and beneficial for the majority of people, but, if you experience chest pain or feel faint while exercising you should stop exercising immediately and contact your doctor. To minimise the risk of adverse effects, if you are new to exercise, begin slowly and gradually build up to the recommended amount:

- Physical activity on most days adding up to 150mins moderate intensity exercise each week (e.g. walking, swimming, cycling)
- Strengthening exercises 2-3 times per week (e.g. gym, carrying heavy bags, yoga)
- Challenging balance activities 2-3 times per week (e.g. tai chi, bowls, dancing)

Something is better than nothing, even if it is just breaking up long periods of sitting with regular walks around the house or doing some exercises in your chair. Please note that chair based exercises, while beneficial for many other things, DO NOT prevent falls – exercises must challenge your balance if they are to be effective.

If you are already reasonably active, you still need to ensure your strength, balance and bone health is at its best. Tai Chi and any form of dancing are great activities to help your bones, muscles and balance.

If you need help or advice about the best activities for you, speak to a physiotherapist or appropriately qualified exercise professional.

For further information regarding community exercise opportunities for older people:

[Middlesbrough](#)

[Redcar & Cleveland](#)

Vision

You may not notice that your vision is changing but, as we age we become less able to adapt to changes in light and darkness, to tell colours apart and to accurately see depth and distance. This can cause problems with bifocals / varifocals, even if they have been worn for years so if you do wear this kind of lens, take care on steps, stairs and patterned or uneven surfaces.

The older we get, the more common eye conditions such as cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration become but, with 70% of visual problems being correctable, it is extremely important to ensure that you have regular eye tests. Remember that eye tests are free if you are 60 or over and many opticians can visit you at home if you are unable to go out and about.

Further information can be found here:

[NHS eye health advice](#)

[Age UK eye health advice](#)

[Find an optician](#)

[Royal National Institute of Blind People](#)

Memory

This may just be a gradual deterioration associated with ageing but can also be associated with stress, poor sleep, infection, certain medications, dementia and excessive consumption or withdrawal from drugs or alcohol.

If your memory issues are minor, you may find that keeping your brain active with puzzles and games or using visual prompts and lists as reminders can help. If memory problems are severe they can impair judgement, reasoning and insight which can then result in risk taking behaviour which may then lead to falls. The ability to recognise and interpret sight, sound and touch may also be affected which can lead to communication and movement difficulties. If you or your friends and family have noticed a change in your memory or behaviour, it is important that you discuss this with your GP or other health professional.

For further information follow the links below:

[NHS information on memory loss](#)

[AgeUK Advice on Dementia](#)

Nutrition and Hydration

It is important to speak to your GP if you are losing weight for an unknown reason as it could be a sign of an underlying medical condition.

Poor nutrition can result in a weakened immune system, difficulties absorbing medication, impaired wound healing and a reduction in muscle and bone strength which may then lead to an increase in falls. Even if your weight is normal, if you are eating a limited range of foods, you could still be malnourished. Good hydration is equally as important as water makes up two thirds of our body and is vital to help digestion and flush out toxins. Being dehydrated can cause headaches, confusion, dizziness, constipation, urine infections, etc. which may all increase the risk of falls. Signs that you are not drinking enough can include feeling thirsty, headaches, tiredness, dry mouth / lips, confusion, dark / smelly urine, constipation.

If you are unsure if you are eating a balanced diet or drinking enough fluid, try keeping a food / drink diary and comparing it to the guidelines below. There are many reasons that your diet may be poor such as small appetite, swallowing difficulties, difficulty sourcing or preparing food, illness and problems with dental health. If you have difficulty shopping or preparing food, speak to family / friends who may be able to help or consider a meal or shopping delivery service. Contact social services if you are having particular difficulties preparing meals and other daily activities as they may be able to help.

Try to eat a varied, balanced diet and maintain good hydration by eating / drinking:

- 2-3 portions of high protein foods every day such as meat, fish, eggs, nuts, beans, pulses, soya, tofu and other meat-free protein foods
- 2-3 portions of dairy foods every day such as cheese, milk and yoghurt or non-dairy alternatives like soya, almond or coconut milk
- 1 serving of starchy food at each meal (e.g. bread, cereals, potatoes, pasta or rice)
- Some fruit and vegetables every day (fresh, frozen, tinned, dried or juiced)
- If you enjoy fish, go for oily fish such as mackerel, salmon, herring, trout, pilchards or sardines as these are rich in omega-3 fatty acids. Aim for 2 portions a week
- At least 6-8 glasses/mugs of fluid every day - keep caffeine intake low as this can worsen dehydration
- If you have diabetes please consult your GP, nurse or dietician before making any changes

Further information:

[NHS Eat Well](#)

[AgeUK Health Eating](#)

Bone Health

Osteoporosis is a condition which causes reduced bone density and increases susceptibility to fracture (breaking a bone). It is more common in women due to bone loss occurring more rapidly after menopause. The likelihood of having osteoporosis increases if you:

- Have ever broken a bone following a minor bump or fall (over the age of 50)
- Have a low BMI
- Have a family history of osteoporosis or hip fracture
- Are a current smoker or drink more than 3 units of alcohol per day
- Have taken oral corticosteroids (e.g. Prednisolone) for more than 3 months
- Have a diagnosis of Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Have Type I diabetes, untreated hyperthyroidism, chronic malnutrition/ malabsorption, chronic liver disease
- Have gone through a premature menopause (<45 years) without taking HRT

If you have broken a bone after a minor bump or fall and haven't discussed your bone health with another professional, it is important to see your GP so your bone health can be assessed. Diet and lifestyle changes can help to keep your bones as strong as possible, regardless of whether you have osteoporosis or not:

- Stop smoking as this can damage the bone building cells in your body
- Keep your alcohol intake low — excessive alcohol can destroy bones and make you unsteady
- Try to take some sort of weight bearing exercise
 - If you have not broken a bone before, exercise which encourages moderate impact as jogging, jumping, stamping would be beneficial.
 - If you have had a previous fracture or are diagnosed with osteoporosis, The Royal Osteoporosis Society can guide you as to which exercises may be suitable for you. Alternatively speak to your physiotherapist
- Ensure your Vitamin D intake is sufficient. We get most of our vitamin D from sunlight and most people in the UK get enough vitamin D by spending 15 minutes in the sun three times a week. It is recommended to take Vit D supplements, particularly over the winter months or if you do not go outdoors. These are available in supermarkets or pharmacies
- Ensure you include plenty of calcium in your diet (1000mg a day)

[The Royal Osteoporosis Society](#)

Feet

Trimming your toenails using a long handled file after bathing, when they are softer, can make them easier to manage independently. If you struggle or you have foot problems that you cannot manage yourself, a podiatrist or chiropodist can help. This is especially important if you have diabetes.

Try to wear footwear that protects and supports your feet with non-slip soles that are not too thick. Avoid high heels or backless footwear as they are more likely to cause you to trip.

For further information:

[What is Podiatry](#)

[Find a Podiatrist](#)

Bladder / Bowel

Some bladder and bowel problems can increase the risk of falls:

- Strong urge to urinate
- Urine infections
- Passing urine more than 10 times in 24hrs
- Having to go to the toilet more than twice nightly
- Constipation - having hard bowel movements less than 3 times a week
- Diarrhoea - loose watery faeces that need to be passed urgently
- Difficulty accessing toilet

These issues can be exacerbated by poor hydration and high caffeine and / or alcohol intake. You can help to keep your bladder and bowel healthy by drinking 6 to 8 cups of fluid per day and minimising any drinks containing caffeine or alcohol. Eating a balanced diet with plenty of fibre e.g. wholegrain bread, cereals, peas and beans and fruit and veg, can help to ease constipation. If you find it difficult getting to the toilet at night, a commode or urinal may be helpful. Speak to your GP about a continence assessment if you are having on-going issues and require further support.

Pelvic floor exercises

Fear of Falling

The more worried you become, the less likely you are to keep active which, in turn, makes you more likely to fall again. You may find that you are more careful with your walking, start to slow down your pace or you begin to leave the house less often. These are very common behaviours and it may mean you've lost some of your confidence when getting around. It is important to remember that there are lots of things that you can do to reduce your risk of falling and improve your confidence. Working through the self-assessment tool on this website is a great start.

Having a falls plan in place can help to reduce anxiety and will reduce the likelihood of being on the floor for a long time.

If you are hurt or unable to get up:

- Summon help by using your pendant alarm, calling out, crawling to a telephone or banging on a wall
- Make sure there are blankets in each room so that you can keep warm
- Move to a softer surface if you are able
- Change position regularly if you are able

If you are unhurt and feel you can get up:

- Roll over onto your hands and knees
- Crawl to a stable piece of furniture such as an armchair and use this to assist you with getting up
- Turn and sit on a chair or bed and rest for a while

If you are worried about falling when you are alone at home, you might want to get a pendant alarm to enable you to call for help even if you can't reach the telephone.

There are also telecare sensors available such as falls detectors for people who would not be able to press a pendant alarm.

Remember

- If you have had a fall, try not to worry about it too much. There are plenty of things you can do to minimise your risk of it happening again
- If your worries are not going away, try talking to someone about it
- Set yourself small goals to build back up to your usual activities – e.g. walk for a short distance first
- Think about all the times you haven't fallen and try to maintain your usual levels of activity

Complete a self-assessment and develop an action plan

Home Safety



Home safety

Living Room / Lounge

Do you have casters under chairs which makes them likely to slide as you get up?

Casters make furniture easier to move but can cause a problem if they slide back just as you are getting up. Either remove the casters or fit cup shaped carpet savers underneath.

Can you get in and out of your chair safely?

If your chair is too high or too low it may need adjusting to make it easier to get in and out of.

Do you have other chairs in your house which are a better height for you? Get someone to swap them over for you.

Do you have to lean or reach to open windows or curtains because furniture is in the way?

Ask someone to help you re-arrange the furniture so that your windows are more accessible

Fire Safety

- Make sure electrical wires and plugs are maintained and don't overload sockets and if it is not in use SWITCH IT OFF!
- Don't dry clothes close to a heat source - they may catch fire from radiated heat
- If you smoke make sure you put it out, right out in an ashtray and empty ashtrays regularly

Kitchen

Is there a risk of falling on wet flooring especially near the sink and washing machine?

Non-slip mats, a fitted carpet or carpet tiles should be used. Wet floor areas should be mopped as soon as possible.

Is everything within easy reach without stretching or climbing on chairs/stools etc?

Stretching and reaching above head height can make you feel dizzy and there is a temptation to climb up on chairs to reach something. Things, which are used regularly, should be on the 'easy to reach shelves'.

If steps have to be used are they secure with a handrail and system to keep the legs locked?

Never use a chair or a stool to stand on. Properly designed steps can be used in reasonable safety if you are fit enough. They must be designed with an effective handrail and with an easily applied lock for the legs. If possible ask someone else to help.

Do you struggle to carry items from the kitchen to dining area?

You might benefit from a kitchen trolley. Trolleys are not recommended as a walking aid they are to carry items from one place to another. If you are unsteady on your feet you will need an assessment to see if a trolley is safe for you to use.

Fire Safety

- Chuck out your chip pan – they are very dangerous and cause thousands of fires each year across the UK
- Stand by your pan – make sure you don't get distracted when cooking if you need to leave the room turn it off
- Don't put metal in the microwave
- Don't wear loose clothing when cooking and keep tea towels away from the hob
- Washers and Dryers can cause fires so only use when in the home and switch off when not in use

Bedroom

Do you feel safe getting in and out of bed?

Consider if your bedding / clothing is increasing the risk of slipping from the bed. Consider if your mattress is too soft and not providing support, or your bed is too high or too low.

Is there a light that can be turned on and off from the bed?

Fit a pull cord for the main light within reach of the bed. A bedside lamp is an alternative though may be a fire hazard if it is permanently plugged in. A battery powered push light fitted next to the bed is a good solution.

Is there a telephone next to your bed?

It is useful to have a telephone in your bedroom. Ensure your pendant alarm, if you have one, is within reach when you are in bed. *DO NOT leave mobile phones charging overnight – Fire Risk*

Fire Safety

- Never smoke in bed
- Don't fold electric blanket and check for wear and tear before use – make sure you switch off before bed
- Have a bedtime routine – switch off electricals, close internal doors and make sure your escape route is clear
- Emollient skin products (for a variety of skin conditions such as psoriasis, eczema, ulcers and bed sores) are safe to use but can leave a flammable residue on clothes or bedding so no naked flames or cigarette.
- If a member of your household uses oxygen Cleveland Fire Brigade can provide specialist advice on fire safety call 01429 874063

Bathroom

Is there a risk of falling on wet vinyl or tiled flooring?

Non-slip mats, a fitted carpet or carpet tiles should be used. Wet floor areas should be mopped as soon as possible.

Can you access the bath and/or shower safely?

Non-slip rubberised mats are readily available. A grab rail may improve your safety / confidence. If you are unable to bathe safely, you may benefit from further assessment.

Can you get on and off the toilet safely?

A grab rail may be helpful instead of using a radiator or any other bathroom fittings for support. A handy person would be able to install one.

Fire Safety

- Have an escape plan in case of fire, make sure exit routes are not blocked and keys are to hand
- if people in the home need assistance to exit then make sure this is considered – call Cleveland Fire Brigade for advice 01429 874063

Stairs and getting about the house

Are staircases and landings well lit?

Routes should be kept illuminated when they are in use and ensure that light switches are easily reached.

Is there a two way light switch present (e.g. a switch at both the top and bottom of stairs)?

Have an electrician fit a two way lightswitch. Consider the local council 'handy person scheme'.

Do you feel stable when going up and down the stairs?

It is essential to have a handrail, even on small flights of stairs. Additional ones can be fitted by the local handyperson scheme. Consider minimising journeys up and down the stairs.

When you walk through a room, do you have to walk around furniture?

Consider moving things so that your path is clear. Ask someone to help if needed and always use your walking aid as instructed.

Are there papers, magazines, books, shoes, boxes, blankets, towels, or other objects on the floor?

Pick up things that are on the floor and always keep objects off the floor. A 'helping hand' may reduce stooping / overreaching.

Do you have to walk over or around cords or wires (e.g. cords and wires from lamps, extension cords or telephone cords)?

Coil or tape cords and wires next to the wall so they are not a tripping hazard. If possible have an electrician put in another socket. Consider a fire home safety check from the local fire brigade who can provide advice and supply / fit smoke alarms if required.

Do you have a letterbox cage to avoid stooping to pick up your letters?

These are quite easy to fit, and apart from saving you from stooping, will also stop papers being spread across the floor just inside the doorway which could make you slip. (Available at DIY stores and the handy person scheme can fit)

Do you have loose rugs or runners on the floor?

Remove the rugs and runners or use non slip matting beneath the rugs to prevent them from slipping.

If you fall do you have a system for calling assistance?

A personal alarm pendant is a good way of doing this, and there are a number of schemes available - see contact details

Are the carpets in good condition and not frayed?

Worn carpets are a major cause of serious falls and should be replaced or secured

Fire Safety

- Make sure you have a working smoke alarm on each level of your home and test it regularly – for support contact Cleveland Fire Brigade on 01429 874063 for a Safer Homes visit, we can also provide specialist alarms for sensory loss

Garden and getting in and out of the house

Are paths clear of leaves and overgrown plants?

Keeping your garden tidy and free of obstacles will make it safer

Are your paving stones free of moss and algae?

Moss and algae can become slippery when wet; prune over hanging plants and branches to improve light and air circulation. You can buy products to remove algae or ask someone to remove it with a pressure washer

Do you have any uneven or broken paving slabs?

Ask someone to replace or straighten them up

Are your flower/vegetable beds at ground level (rather than in containers or raised beds)?

Try not to spend too long in one position and take care when standing up from a bent over position

Try to alternate activities between seated ones and standing ones

Consider container gardening or raised beds

Do you have high step(s) to get in and out of the property?

You may benefit from an additional step and / or grab rails

Remember to use your walking aid (if you use one) outdoors as well.

Fire Safety

- Store wheelie bins and rubbish securely away from property and bring bins back in as soon as possible after rubbish collection

Sensory Support

Do you have adequate lighting in your home?

Ensure that you have the correct level of lighting in your home. If you need brighter lighting fluorescent bulbs are brighter and cost less to use

Are the lighting levels in your home consistent?

It is safest to have similar lighting in a room. Add lighting to dark areas and you can hang lightweight curtains or shades to reduce glare.

Is the path from your bed to the bathroom dark?

Put in a night light so that you can see where you are walking. Night lights are low energy lights which plug into a mains socket. A dusk to dawn light will switch on and off automatically

Do you have regular eye checks?

Have your eyes checked by an optician at least once a year and update your glasses. Opticians can visit you at home if you are unable to get out.

Fire Safety

Do you have working smoke alarms in the correct positions in your home and are you aware of the fire risks within your home?

Consider a Fire Home Safety Check from the local Fire Brigade. Cleveland Fire Brigade will visit your home, provide safety advice, make any recommendations and fit and test smoke alarms.

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YOUR FEET**

www.steadyonyourfeet.org