



A GUIDE FOR PATIENTS AND CARERS PREVENTING FALLS AT HOME

Taking falls seriously

If you're unwell or caring for someone who is sick and at home, it's important that you take measures to prevent a fall. There are ways you can reduce the risk, including making simple changes to the home and doing exercises to improve strength and balance.

Some people may be reluctant to seek help and advice from their GP and other support services about preventing falls because they believe their concerns will not be taken seriously. However, all healthcare professionals take falls in older people and the poorly very seriously because of the significant impact they can have on a person's health.

Discuss any falls with your GP or one of our nurses, and say if it's had any impact on health and wellbeing of the person you are caring for. Your GP can carry out some simple balance tests to check whether there is an increased risk of falling in the future.

Preventing falls

Tips for preventing falls in the home include:

- immediately mopping up spillages
- removing clutter, trailing wires and frayed carpet
- using non-slip mats and rugs using high-wattage light bulbs in lamps and torches so you can see clearly

- getting help to do things you're unable to do safely on your own
- not walking on slippery floors in socks or tights
- not wearing loose-fitting, trailing clothes that might trip you up
- wearing well-fitting shoes that are in good condition and support the ankle
- taking care of your feet by trimming your toenails regularly and seeing a GP or chiropodist about any foot problems
- light it right. Inadequate lighting is another major hazard. Install brighter light bulbs where needed, particularly in stairways and narrow hallways.

Strength and balance training

Doing regular strength exercises and balance exercises can improve your strength and balance, and reduce your risk of having a fall. This can take the form of simple activities such as walking and dancing, or specialist training programmes. Many community centres and local gyms offer specialist training programmes for older people. Exercises that can be carried out at home are also available. Ask your GP about training programmes in your area.

It's important that a strength and balance training programme is tailored to the individual and monitored by an appropriately trained professional. There's also evidence that taking part in regular tai chi sessions can reduce the risk of falls. Tai chi is a Chinese martial art that places particular emphasis on movement, balance and co-ordination. Unlike other martial arts, tai chi does not involve physical contact or rapid physical movements, making it an ideal activity for older people.

Medication review

If you're taking long-term medication, your GP should review your medicines regularly to make sure they're still right for you. It's particularly important that your medicines are reviewed if you're taking 4 or more medicines a day. Your GP may recommend alternative medication or lower doses if they feel the side effects increase your chances of having a fall. In some cases, it may be possible for the medication to be stopped. See your GP or nurse if you have not had your medication reviewed for more than a year, or if you're concerned that the medicines you or a relative are taking may increase the risk of falling.

Sight tests

Make an appointment to have a sight test if you're concerned that poor vision (even when wearing glasses) is increasing your risk of having a fall. Not all vision problems can be cured, but some problems can be treated with surgery – for example, cataracts can be removed using cataract surgery.

Home hazard assessment

You can request a home hazard assessment if you're concerned that you or a relative may be at risk of having a fall, or if you know someone who has recently had a fall. As well as identifying potential hazards, the aim of a home hazard assessment is to explore how a person's actual use of the environment affects their risk of falling.

A healthcare professional with experience in fall prevention will visit you or your relative's home to identify potential hazards and advise on how to deal with them. For example, as the bathroom is a common place where falls occur, many older people or people with long term, serious sickness, can benefit from having bars fitted to the inside of their bath to make it easier for them to get in and out.

Fitting a personal alarm system may also signal for help in the event of a fall. An alternative would be to always keep a mobile phone in your pocket so you can phone for help after having a fall.

Alcohol

Drinking alcohol can lead to loss of co-ordination and exaggerate the effects of some medicines. This can significantly increase the risk of a fall, particularly in older people. Avoiding alcohol or reducing the amount you drink can reduce your risk of having a fall. Excessive drinking can also contribute to the development of osteoporosis.

What to do if you fall

If you have a fall, it's important to keep calm. If you're not hurt and you feel strong enough to get up, don't get up quickly. Roll on to your hands and knees and look for a stable piece of furniture, such as a chair or bed. Hold on to the furniture with both hands to support yourself and, when you feel ready, slowly get up. Sit down and rest for a while before carrying on with your daily activities. If you're hurt or unable to get up, try to get someone's attention by calling out for help, banging on the wall or floor, or using your aid call button (if you have one). If possible, crawl to a telephone and dial 999 to ask for an ambulance. Try to reach something warm, such as a blanket or dressing gown, to put over you, particularly your legs and feet. Stay as comfortable as possible and try to change your position at least once every half an hour or so. If you're living with or caring for an elderly person, see what to do after an incident for more information and advice.

Source: www.nhs.co.uk

If you have any questions or concerns, please get in touch with one of our nurses on the number below.