

Avoiding slips, trips and broken hips



Information for older people on how to avoid accidental falls in the home



People are living longer, and have a right to expect the highest possible quality of life. But it's a sad fact that falls among older people are very common. And so many of these falls can easily be prevented. Here are some simple steps to follow:



Help yourself be safer

Keep physically active

Falls can be due to weak muscles and poor balance. You can improve these by:

- Regular physical activity, such as brisk walking, light gardening, housework, dancing and keep fit classes.
- Regular gentle exercise and massage can relieve arthritic pain and swelling.
- T'ai Chi has been shown to improve balance and reduce risk of falls but check that the teacher is experienced in working with older people.



Remember, if you are new to physical activity

- speak to your GP first
- start gently, progress slowly and listen to your body.

Restricting your activity because of a past fall or fear of a fall may increase the chances of another fall.

- Many of the problems after a fall (hypothermia, pneumonia) are due to the 'long lie' when somebody cannot get up even if they have not injured themselves. Try using furniture to help you get up if you can not get someone to help you.

Take fewer risks in your routine

When you get out of bed, or off a chair after a long sit, it is a good idea to do it in slow stages.

A sudden drop in blood pressure often leads to light-headedness when you stand quickly. Try tensing your arms and legs a few times before you stand as this often helps. Consider raising the head of the bed with a wedge pillow.

If you need to go to the toilet in the night, turn on a light rather than use a torch. If you need to stoop, hold onto something secure.



Be aware of changes in your health



- Have regular eye check-ups and foot care. If you are entitled to a free NHS eye check, see if a home visit can be arranged.
- If you are on more than four medications, ask your GP to review them on a regular basis – let your GP know if your pills make you dizzy.
- Never mix alcohol with medications as the interaction can cause dizziness and loss of balance.
- Ask your GP about getting a 'flu' jab. Illnesses such as influenza can, in the short term, make you far more prone to falling.

- If you are feeling unwell, let a friend or neighbour know.
- Take care if you have spine and neck arthritis. This can lead to dizziness if you lean your head back or turn your head too quickly.



Clothes, shoes and glasses

■ Avoid wearing loose-fitting or open-backed slippers, sandals, shoes with heels, flared trousers, trailing nightdresses or other footwear or clothing that might cause you to slip or trip. Wear thin-soled or flat shoes or ones with an in-built heel, rather than trainer type shoes. Avoid walking in socks or tights on slippery floors.



■ Separate glasses for reading and distance are safer than bifocals or vari-focals. You may be able to receive financial help with buying your glasses, ask your optician for advice.



■ Consider buying hip protector underwear that reduces the risk of a hip fracture as a result of a fall. They are washable and not visible under clothing and should be worn day and night. Ask your GP where they can be obtained.

Precautions in and around the home

Small changes in your home can help reduce accidents:



- fitting a letterbox cage can help you avoid stooping to pick up letters
- using 100W light bulbs in the kitchen and stairways will make it easier to see any potential hazards
- buying long-life bulbs saves changing them so often and saves energy and money in the long-run
- highlighting the outer edge of steps with non-slip white paint will make them more visible
- try to avoid having trailing wires and clutter in walking areas and on stairs
- using non-slip mats under rugs, in the kitchen, inside and next to the bath and on stair landings will help you to avoid trips
- handrails by the toilet, bath and stairs will help you balance and can make getting around easier
- if you remove or repair frayed carpet edges this will make them safer and you will be less likely to trip over them
- think about storing frequently used items in areas that avoid you having to over stretch or stoop





- see if you can get help for chores such as changing curtains or light bulbs
- using a sturdy set of non-slip steps with a safety chain and handrail is safer than standing on a chair
- if you lean or hold onto easily moveable furniture removing any casters will make them more stable

- spreading salty sand on wet or icy steps will make them less slippery
- by always mopping up spills immediately you will reduce the risk of slipping for you and any visitors

Consider extra telephone extensions around the home, or an answering machine, rather than rushing to answer the phone.



A personal fall alarm system will reassure you and your family.

For further information on these systems contact Age Concern's Information Line (see back of leaflet).

Try and keep your home warm as cold muscles work less efficiently and can increase the chance of accident and injury.

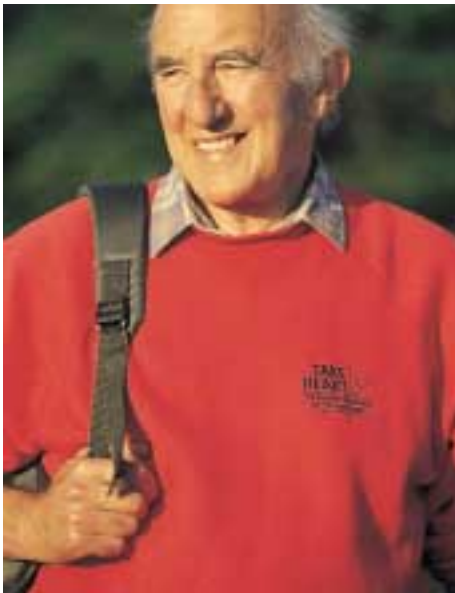
If you have a pet that gets under your feet consider fitting a brightly coloured collar to make them more visible.

Where can you get more help?

Tell your GP about your falls. It is often possible to identify treatable problems. Your GP can assess if you need a bone scan or hip protector underwear.

Age Concern and Care and Repair schemes within local councils offer confidential advice on falls prevention, welfare rights and benefits that can help the purchase of safety equipment and sometimes offer free home safety and security checks. Help the Aged, Age Concern and some local authorities offer limited financial assistance to purchase a fall alarm.

Home exercise books or videos can be obtained from Research Into Ageing and good bookshops



What to do if you have a fall

Try not to panic! If you have hurt yourself or feel pain try to attract attention before moving. If you cannot get help then try to get up by crawling to a sturdy chair and getting up from your knees, using a chair for support, and sit on it for a while before standing.

If you cannot get up on your own, try to keep warm by finding something nearby to use as a blanket and tensing your leg and arm muscles regularly to produce heat.

Try to contact a neighbour by banging on a wall or floor, or the emergency services, a friend or relative by phoning.

Inform your GP after any fall, particularly if you were unable to get up off the floor on your own.

Be safe...

Be careful...

Be independent



Useful contacts

■ Help The Aged – SeniorLine 0808 8006565

Help The Aged
St James's Walk
Clerkenwell Green
London
EC1R 0BE

Available Monday to Friday from 9.00am to 4.00pm. A free national advice service for older people and their carers. Advice is given on welfare and disability rights, housing and community care.

■ Age Concern Information Line 0800 009966

Age Concern
Information Line
Freepost (SW30375)
Ashburton
Devon
TQ13 7ZZ

Available seven days a week from 7.00am to 7.00pm. A free helpline for older people and their carers seeking information on issues such as money, health, community care, housing, transport, heating and education.

■ Research into Ageing

Baird House
15-17 St Cross St
London
EC1N 8UW
0171 404 6878

A national medical research charity promoting good health by preventing the major causes of disability in later life and improving their treatment. Booklets and videos on exercise available on donation to the charity.

■ Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

Edgbaston Park
353 Bristol Road
Birmingham
B5 7ST
0121 248 2000

A registered charity that provides information and advice on the promotion of safety within the home.

■ Local authority

Your local council's telephone number can be found in the phone book.

For local information contact: