

## **Strength & Balance community-based falls prevention classes are being expanded across Oxfordshire**

Age UK Oxfordshire is increasing the number of its highly successful Strength and Balance classes to help prevent falls across the county.

Every year, more than one in three (3.4 million) people over 65 suffer a fall that can cause serious injury, and even death. In Oxfordshire there are approximately 153,000 people over the age of 60. Falls may result in dependence, immobilization and depression, which could lead to further restrictions in daily activities for a person. A fall can precipitate moving into residential care as after a hip fracture, 50 per cent of people can no longer live independently.

People may fall due to a multitude of possible reasons: medication, effects of ageing, decreased balance and frailty, medical conditions as well as external factors such as uneven pavements, ice and loose shoes or slippers to name but a few.

There are around 255,000 falls-related emergency hospital admissions in England among patients aged 65 and older<sup>1</sup>. In the South East this number was around 3,269 in year 2015-2016.

For the person who has suffered a fall, as well as their family, the potentially life-changing effects are traumatic. There is also the cost to consider; hip fractures alone cost over £2.3bn per year<sup>2</sup>.

But we know that falls in later life are preventable, and there is strong evidence to show that exercise specifically tailored to increase strength and improve balance offers one of the best ways of preventing falls.

### ***How can we prevent and reduce the number of falls?***

Age UK Oxfordshire's Generation Games run community-based "Strength & Balance" exercise classes across Oxfordshire to give older and less-mobile people in the community access to evidence-based targeted exercise sessions that are specifically aimed at strengthening muscles and improving balance.

Sarah Wheatley, Exercise Specialist: long-term conditions, at Age UK Oxfordshire's said: 'At a Strength & Balance class, the group will work, through a series of evidence-based and targeted movements and exercises. We usually work without music, sitting in a semi-circle. And we often use equipment such as Therabands or light weights. One of the key skills that these sessions teach is how

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<sup>1</sup> 4 [Public Health England. Public Health Outcomes Framework [Internet]. 2016 [cited 2016 Nov 24]. Available from: [www.phoutcomes.info/search/falls](http://www.phoutcomes.info/search/falls)].

<sup>2</sup> [1 Fracture Prevention Services: An economic evaluation, Department of Health, November 2009]

to get down safely onto the floor - and back up again – an essential life skill for someone who is worried about falling. These sessions are more like group physiotherapy and participants take their exercises seriously, but we all enjoy laughing together and a great sense of camaraderie develops.’

Age UK Oxfordshire’s Head of Physical Activity, Alastair Thomas, adds: ‘At the moment, we have 11 Strength & Balance sessions running across the county but we have plans for many more because we know they work. Our vision is that everyone in later life should be able to access such a class and urge people to get in touch with us if they are interested. A real bonus is that if people are referred by their GP or healthcare professional, they can attend 6 weeks of Strength & Balance entirely free of charge ’.

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**Falls Service** – comprehensive falls prevention and intervention service across Oxfordshire

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**ENDS**

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Editor’s notes

### **About Age UK Oxfordshire**

Age UK Oxfordshire is an independent local charity dedicated to giving older people in Oxfordshire comfort, support and opportunities and enabling them to love later life.

We provide free local information, advice and support; commercial products and services; and research and campaign on the issues that matter to people in later life. We work with our national partner, Age UK, and our local Age UK partners in England. Our work focuses on five key areas: money matters, health and wellbeing, home and care, work and training and leisure and lifestyle.

You can find further information on all our services and volunteering opportunities by telephoning 0345 450 1276 or by visiting our website: [www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire)

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