

## Falls Prevention Advice

Our falls prevention advice page gives you a brief introduction to falls, the consequences of falls, how to reduce the risk of falls and what to do to prevent falls in the future.

You will also find in this page a Home Safety Checklist that you can download and use to help you prevent falls and maintain an independent lifestyle.

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### Why preventing falls is important

As people grow older they are increasingly at risk of falling and injuring themselves.

Every year between 33 and 50 per cent of people over the age of 65 suffer a fall. For every 100 of those people who fall, 20 will need medical help and just under 10 will sustain a fracture. Falls can lead to a long stay in hospital.

Falls are the most important type of accident and many occur in and around the home.

In 2002-2003 the number of falls reported at A&E, Whipps Cross University Hospital was 3912, of which 2015 were falls in the home alone! One in two falls reported occurred at home. During the same period the number of patients admitted due to a fall was 1639: 4 in 10 falls reported resulted in a hospital admission.

Falls can cause loss of confidence, self-esteem and reduced independence.

Falls can often result in fractures (broken bones), most commonly in the hips and wrists. People with thin bones, as a result of osteoporosis, are likely to sustain fractures more often. Falls can often result in a 'long lie' for a person who is unable to get up from the floor.

This can have potentially serious consequences such as hypothermia, bronchopneumonia and pressure sores. A 'long lie' of 12 hours or more can seriously affect a person's recovery from a fall.

## The consequences of a fall

Physical	Social	Psychological
Discomfort and pain	Loss of independence	Loss of confidence
Serious injury	Loss of social contacts	Loss of independence
Inability to look after oneself	Move to residential care	Fear
Long term disability	Financial costs of help/care	Distress
	Decreased quality of life	Guilt
	Changes to daily routine	Blame
		Anxiety
		Embarrassment

## Why you might fall

You are more likely to fall as you get older because as you age, your sense of balance may decline, your muscles may weaken, your vision may deteriorate and your reaction time slows, making it harder for you to avoid something in your path or adjust to a sudden change in the surface on which you are walking.

### Medication

Medication can also affect your balance or perception. Your risk of falling may increase if you are on four medications or more, if you take diuretics, sedatives or other sleeping medications, high blood pressure medications or medication for some psychological conditions.

[Download the Medication Chart Reminder from our website »](#)

[Download the Medication Review from our website »](#)

In addition, older people may be often affected by many health conditions that can increase the risk of falls.

### Practice moderation

The negative effects of too much alcohol on our sight, hearing, balance and judgement about personal safety are very clear. Whether used alone or combined with medication, alcohol use can result in dangerous falls. Keep to wise and moderate consumption.

### Poor vision

Poor vision, cataracts, macular degeneration and glaucoma can affect your perception or make it difficult for you to see obstacles. Regular eyesight tests should be part of your routine.

View our Poor Vision contact list

## **Gait and balance disorders**

Stroke, Parkinson's disease and hypothyroidism, among others can affect your balance and ability to walk.

Weakness or a general lack of conditioning can also have an effect. If you are concerned about your gait or balance, speak to your GP about it.

## **Lung disease**

Disease of the lung, such as emphysema, may make it difficult for you to get around. When you become inactive, you may lose some of your muscle conditioning and balance. That may increase your chance of falling when you walk. If you are concerned about this, discuss with your GP or chest specialist the possibility of being referred to a physiotherapist to teach you breathing control and breathing exercises.

Visit the British Lung Foundation for more information

## **Cardiovascular disease**

Congestive heart failure, arrhythmia and other conditions affecting your heart and blood vessels can cause fainting or lead to inactive lifestyles which, as with lung disease, can increase your risk of falls. If you are worried about falling, it may be worth telling your GP about this.

View our Cardiovascular Disease contact list

## **Disorders affecting your legs and feet**

Arthritis, foot problems, muscle weakness and peripheral neuropathy (nerve damage that can cause unsteadiness and numbness), tingling, weakness and pain in your feet or hands may affect your coordination or lead to an inactive lifestyle that puts you at risk of falls.

## **Bladder conditions**

Incontinence or the need to urinate frequently, especially at night, can lead to falls in several ways. You may stand up too quickly, leading to faintness from a momentary drop in blood pressure. Or you may trip on your way to the bathroom because you are still sleepy or you did not turn on the light. Take your time getting up and make sure that you can switch lights on from bed and other appropriate places. If you are concerned about this contact your district nurse or visit the Age UK website where you can download further information.

## **Bringing up your concerns**

Discuss concerns about falling with your GP. Your GP may check for vision problems and/or review prescribed medications. Your GP may also evaluate your balance and movement. If necessary, he or she may prescribe physical therapy to help improve your balance and strength. Your GP may also recommend that you use a walking stick or other walking aid.

If you are concerned about someone you know falling then show them this information. You might also wish to contact local services.

## Falls: Reducing the risks

### General physical fitness

Given that your daily routines may become less physically demanding or you may stop a sport or exercise regime as you get older, you can experience reduced physical fitness, increasing the risk of falls. Maintaining or regaining physical fitness is the most effective preventive measure of all. All forms of exercise, formal and informal, can help maintain strength and vitality and protect you from injury.

### Ability to maintain balance

Balance is an important element of fitness. Tai Chi, yoga and dancing are all exercises that increase balance and steadiness - proof that keeping fit can be fun. Other factors can affect balance, including improper use of spectacles, misuse or disuse of assistive devices, and certain medications. Exercise for balance and use devices and medications appropriately. Speak to your GP if you wish to take up exercise or are unsure about how to use assistive devices or take your medication.

### Footwear and care

Poorly fitting shoes or slippers and poor foot health contribute to risks of falling. Research has shown that older people are more likely to fall in the home if they are wearing ill-fitting footwear. A significant number of older people fall every year because of slippers that do not fit very well or have become unsafe through wear and tear - a problem identified as one of the main causes of falls.

Although falls at home are a major cause of death and disability in older people, many could be prevented by taking relatively simple measures. By acquiring new, properly fitted slippers, you can eliminate one of the big risk factors known to cause people to fall in the first place. Practice good foot care. Check your feet regularly.

[Download our Preventing Foot Trouble Guide from our website »](#)

[Download our leaflet about Footwear Advice from our website »](#)

Our Foot Care Contact List begins on page 7 below.

### Diet and eating habits

Regular healthy meals help keep up strength and vitality. If you do not enjoy preparing meals for yourself, think about inviting friends, eating out or developing a routine that makes you look forward to your meals such as taking a walk to work up an appetite, trying out new recipes, or having a special treat.

Missing meals can cause weakness and dizziness. Eating regular, balanced, healthy meals will help you to keep your strength.

## Social isolation

Post-falls syndrome such as depression, fear of falling and other psychological problems are common effects of repeated falls. Loss of self-confidence as well as social withdrawal, confusion and loneliness can occur, even when there has been no injury. There is a wide range of services available in the community that can be accessed to help you regain your confidence.

## Hazards at home

Making simple changes at home, whether it's for you or someone living with you can also reduce the risk of falling. Here is a safety reminder:

### Living room

Keep electrical and telephone cords tucked out of the way. Arrange furniture so that you can move around it easily. Get rid of throw rugs and make sure carpeting is secured to the floor. Buy chairs and couches that are easy to get up from.

### Kitchen

Use a slip-resistant step stool when you need something from a high shelf, or consider moving items to a lower shelf. Make sure phone and electrical cords are out of the way.

### Bathroom

Install grab bars on walls around the bathtub and beside the toilet - soap dishes or a towel rod can break away under a person's weight. Install a toilet seat riser. Use nonskid mats, adhesive strips or carpet on surfaces that may get wet. If you have difficulty getting in and out of the tub, consider installing a padded shower seat and a portable, hand-held shower head to let you to sit while bathing. Keep children's toys out of the tub.

### Bedroom

Get rid of throw rugs. Place light switches within reach of the bed and install a night light between the bedroom and bathroom. Make sure that you can reach the telephone from your bed. Install a grab bar next to the bed. When you do get up from bed, do so slowly to avoid dizziness. Nightwear should be short enough so that you will not trip over it.

## Stairways, hallways and pathways

Keep free of clutter and check to see that areas are well lit. Make sure your carpet is secured and get rid of throw rugs. Install handrails on both sides of the stairs and make sure they are securely mounted. Apply brightly coloured tape to the face of the steps to make them more visible.

If you want to find more about how to prevent falls at home please check our Falls Safety Check list. This questionnaire is aimed to assist you to identify areas within your home environment that could be made safer and prevent falls in the future.

## Top Tips - Quick Reminder

Remove throw rugs and excess furniture, such as coffee tables. Avoid high-gloss wax on floors. If small children or pets live in the house, keep their toys off the floor.

In some situations, the use of hip protectors (pads you wear over your hips to prevent fractures) can help to prevent injury from falls. If you are interested in them ask your GP or nurse for more details.

Other tips for avoiding falls at home include wearing rubber-soled or low-heeled shoes to prevent slips and purchasing a cordless phone to carry with you so that you do not have to hurry to answer the phone. If you are worried that you may not be able to get up if you fall, consider using an Aid-Call.

### In the garden

Put the hose away in a secure area when you are not using it. Make sure rakes and shovels are safely put away when not in use. Wear shoes that support and stabilise you. Have garden tools handy (i.e. in your gardening apron pocket).

Do not walk on wet grass; keep the yard, pathways and steps free of leaves and twigs. Make sure your garden furniture and ornaments are steady and in good repair. Install handrails where there are steps.

### When going out

Take all the time you need, plan ahead, do not rush. Wear footwear to prevent slipping and avoid laces that may come undone. Use your walking aid if needed. Walk carefully, be alert of sidewalk cracks, obstacles, slopes, slippery surfaces and other hazards.

Do not load yourself down with packages. Take advantage of home delivery or use a pushcart (which can also act as a walking aid).

Be a defensive walker, watch for traffic, bicycles and rollerbladers. Plan your trip so you do not have to go out during the rush hour, darkness or bad weather.

# Footcare Contact List

Where to get further information

## Your GP

Always consult your GP following a fall even if you are not badly hurt. She or he can determine the cause of the fall and if necessary refer you on to appropriate help.

## The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

RoSPA provides a variety of advice and information on falls:

### Write to:

RoSPA Information Services

Edgbaston Park

353 Bristol Road

Birmingham

B5 7ST

Phone: 0121 248 2064

Email: [help@rospa.com](mailto:help@rospa.com)

[Visit their website](#)

## Primary Care Occupational Therapy Team

Will be able to advise you on how to make your home safer, and advise you on the way to do things and supply of equipment (if necessary).

### Contact

**Ainslie Rehabilitation Unit.**

Phone: 020 8535 6591

**Social Services - Waltham Forest**

Phone: 020 8496 3000.

## Physiotherapists

Some physiotherapists specialise in the needs of older people and can assess your ability to get up from a fall without help, advice on the safest method of getting up from a fall and where appropriate teach specific exercise and supply mobility aids.

## The Waltham Forest Falls Collaborative

Provides a wide range of information to all older people living in the community or can advice about services available in the borough. The Falls Collaborative also provide services to older people who have fallen or are at risk of falls who are not known to services, or refer them on to appropriate services if necessary.

### **Contact Chris Bateson:**

Phone: 020 8558 8716

Email: [c.bateson@ageukwalthamforest.org.uk](mailto:c.bateson@ageukwalthamforest.org.uk)

## Aid-Call

Age UK Waltham Forest provides a range of pendant alarms to suit different needs. The alarms consist of a lightweight transmitter (worn on a wrist strap or neck cord) and a unit connected to a standard telephone socket.

### **Contact Aslam Syyed (Trading Co-ordinator)**

Phone: 020 8532 8031

Email: [trading@ageukwalthamforest.org.uk](mailto:trading@ageukwalthamforest.org.uk)

## The Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB)

Information and advice for anyone with serious sight problems. Available, Mondays to Fridays - 9am to 5pm.

Phone: 0303 123 9999

[Visit their website](#)

## The Outside Clinic

If you have difficulty in getting to a high street optician or difficulty with mobility you may qualify for a free Domiciliary Eye Test. The Outside Clinic, the UK's longest established domiciliary eye testing service, can test your eyes in your own home.

### **For further information or to arrange a visit:**

Freephone: 0800 85 44 77

[Visit their website](#)

## Lung diseases

The British Lung Foundation, is an organisation working for those affected by lung disease. On their website you can find out more about specific conditions or locate your nearest support group.

[Visit their website](#)

## Cardiovascular disease

The British Heart Foundation (BHF) is the leading national charity fighting heart and circulatory diseases. Heart information line on 08450 70 80 70 - Lines available Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm.

[Visit their website](#)

## Foot care

If you feel you need chiropody treatment, you should discuss this with your GP. In many cases your doctor will be able to arrange free treatment through the NHS. However, owing to the pressure on this service you may have to wait for sometime before seeing an NHS chiropodist. If you would prefer to pay privately for chiropody treatment, ask your doctor to recommend a local Registered Chiropodist doing private work.

If you cannot afford private treatment call Chris Bateson from The Falls Collaborative:

Phone: 020 8558 8716 for further information

Email: [c.bateson@ageukwalthamforest.org.uk](mailto:c.bateson@ageukwalthamforest.org.uk)

## Other useful contacts:

For a Chiropodist based in Chingford - [www.sorefeet.co.uk](http://www.sorefeet.co.uk)

## Falls: Self-Home Safety Checklist

ACWF Falls Collaborative provides information and advice on how to prevent falls.

Contact Chris Bateson

Phone: 020 8558 8716

Email: [c.bateson@ageukwalthamforest.org.uk](mailto:c.bateson@ageukwalthamforest.org.uk)

Fill in our [online assessment](#) form so that we can review your situation

## Handyperson

Small house maintenance jobs including plumbing and electrical jobs for older people at reasonable cost. References taken up by Age UK Waltham Forest.

Contact Ricky Sturgess

Phone: 07950 744 854

## Community Equipment Service

Equipment can make easier and safer to deal with everyday tasks such as preparing food, bathing, toileting and getting around at home and in the community.

For more information or an assessment please contact 020 8558 8716

or email: [c.bateson@ageukwalthamforest.org.uk](mailto:c.bateson@ageukwalthamforest.org.uk)