

The Ups and Downs of Falling

Working together to prevent falls



Introduction

Falling is a common problem throughout our lifetime, but as we get older the risk of injury from falls gets higher.

Physical injury, such as a fracture, can be one of the consequences of falling. Less obvious, but as important, is the worry and loss of confidence that can affect you after a fall.



- There are often medical reasons why people fall.
- Some are treatable.
- There are also ways to reduce the risk of injury associated with a fall.

This booklet gives useful tips to help you avoid falls.



It will reinforce advice and information given to you by your therapist, nurse, social worker, doctor and pharmacist.

Research shows that while we may not be able to prevent every fall, by working together we can reduce the risk of having another fall.



Why do I fall?

There are two main reasons why people fall.



- The first is due to environmental hazards such as tripping on loose carpets.
- The second is more individual e.g. a person having poor balance, weak legs, poor eyesight or stiff hips, knees and ankles.

Who can help me reduce my chance of falling?

Nurse/Doctor

- Will investigate causes of falling
- Will review medication and advise you on your care

Physiotherapist

- Will assess your strength, balance and walking
- Will teach you appropriate exercises

Occupational Therapist

- Will advise you about equipment and adaptations to increase your safety and independence at home

Podiatrist/Chiropodist

- Will help relieve painful feet and provide advice on footwear to reduce the risk of falling

Pharmacist

- Will explain the reasons for taking your medication and will advise you how to take them safely

Social Worker

- Will provide information to help you live independently.
- Can advise you about benefits.
- Will assist you to access services such as Home Help or Day Care.

Dietitian

- Will provide you with information and advice on a healthy diet.

Other people who can help you are opticians, family, carers and neighbours.

What can I do to help myself?

1. Make my home safer

- Remove clutter from floors and stairways.
- Lift all loose mats.
- Avoid trailing flexes - telephone/electrical wires.
- Ensure your furniture arrangement allows enough room for your walking aid.
- Have easy grip handrails on outdoor steps and both sides of stairs.
- Keep stairs and outdoor steps well lit.
- Use long-life light bulbs to avoid frequent changing.
- Paint outer edge of steps with non-slip white paint.
- Avoid wet or icy steps or paths.



2. Look after my eyesight

- Have your eyes tested every two years, or every year if you are over 70, or have diabetes or glaucoma (eye testing is free after age 60).

3. Take care with my day-to-day activities

- Sit down to wash and dress.
- Don't wear clothes or nightwear that are too long and might make you trip.
- Get up from chair or bed slowly to avoid dizziness.
- Use a non-slip bath or shower mat.
- Fit handrails by the toilet, bath and shower.
- Use a 'Helping Hand' to avoid bending or over-stretching.
- Never get up in the dark - use a bedside light and wear your pendant alarm.



- If you feel nervous on the stairs, try to use them as little as possible.
- Don't rush to answer the doorbell or telephone. Why not buy a portable phone which can be carried from room to room.

4. Look after my feet

- Wear well fitting shoes - lace-ups are best.
- Don't wear loose slippers or shoes without backs.
- Don't wear high heels.
- Remember not to walk on slippery floors in socks or tights.



5. Keep active

- Regular exercise such as walking or gardening will help your balance and strength.
- Gentle stretches can help your joints.

6. Looking after my health

- Get the flu and pneumonia vaccine.
- Take extra care when you are unwell - don't be afraid to ask for help.



7. Seeking advice for bladder problems

- Contact your doctor/nurse about any difficulties you are experiencing, for example, incontinence.

8. Wear a pendant alarm

- Wearing a pendant alarm means you can get help quickly if you are in difficulties.
- A pendant alarm is worn around your neck or on your wrist. If you fall and can't get up, you just press the button on the alarm.
- This sends a signal down your telephone line to an emergency response centre.
- The centre holds a list of names and phone numbers of people you would want contacted and rings one of them to come and help you.
- It is important that you wear your alarm all the time, even when you get up at night to go to the bathroom - who knows when you might need it?
- Pendant alarms are available from:



Age NI

Aidcall

Tel: 0808 100 4545

Fold Telecare

Telecare

Tel: 028 9039 7103

9. Help prevent osteoporosis - thin bones which are more fragile

- Ensure a healthy diet, rich in calcium e.g. milk, cheese, sardines, yoghurts etc.
- Vitamin D is necessary for the body to absorb calcium. The most important source of Vitamin D is sunlight. If you are housebound or have any concerns, it may be necessary to take a Vitamin D supplement. Ask your GP or Pharmacist for advice. Vitamin D can also be found in smaller amounts in fortified breakfast cereals, margarines, eggs, meat, oily fish and cod liver oil.
- Increase your level of activity - if in doubt, ask for advice.
- Smoking and too much alcohol has a damaging effect on your bones.

10. Manage your Medicines

- Some medicines can cause side effects which can make you feel dizzy, drowsy or unsteady and can result in a fall.
- If you experience any of the above symptoms or take four or more different medicines each day, ask your doctor or pharmacist to review your medicines.

What should I do if I fall?

Try to summon help:

- Don't panic - try to stay calm.
- Assess the situation - if you are hurt or feel unable to get up, follow THE REST AND WAIT PLAN.
- If you are unhurt and know you are able to get up, follow THE UP AND ABOUT PLAN.

The Rest and Wait Plan

Try to summon help:

- Use a pendant alarm if you have one.
- Bang on the wall.
- Call out for help.
- Crawl towards your phone and dial 999.
- Move to a soft surface such as a carpet.

Keep warm:

- Try to reach for something to cover yourself.
- Try to move out of draughts.

Keep moving:

- Do not lie in one position for too long, as you may get cold or could develop a pressure sore.
- Roll from side to side and move your arms and legs if possible - this will help to keep you warm.

If you need to empty your bladder while on the floor, use something such as tissues or an item of clothing to soak up the wet. If it is not too painful for you, move away from the wet area.



The Up and About Plan

If you think you are unhurt:

Roll onto hands and knees and crawl to a stable piece of furniture such as a bed, stool or chair.

With hands on the support, place one foot flat on the floor, bending your knee in front of your tummy.



Lean forwards, push on your hands and feet, and bring your feet together.

Slowly turn and sit on the seat. Rest for a while before slowly getting up



If you have fallen and hit your head

Over the next 24 hours make sure:


- You rest quietly at home
- There is a responsible adult with you
- You have access to a phone, to get medical help if required
- You avoid drugs that are not prescribed and alcohol
- You avoid sleeping tablets or tranquilisers

Information for family members/friends

The person should be brought to the nearest Emergency department if you observe any of the following:

- They become increasingly drowsy or confused.
- They are hard to wake up.
- They vomit more than 2-3 times.
- They have any type of fit/seizure.
- They have a visual disturbance.
- One pupil is larger than the other.
- Headaches become more severe.
- You become increasingly concerned about their condition.

If you would like to give feedback on any of our services please contact:
Email: user.feedback@northerntrust.hscni.net
Telephone: 028 9442 4655

 Northern Health and Social Care Trust

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www.northerntrust.hscni.net

Our Vision

To deliver excellent integrated services in partnership with our community

'A copy of this booklet can be obtained from:
The Health Improvement and Community Development Service' T: 028 2563 5575

Our Values

COMPASSION



C

OPENNESS



O

RESPECT



R

EXCELLENCE



E