

Avoiding slips, trips and broken hips

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Be safe ...



Be careful ...



Be independent ...

Avoiding slips, trips and broken hips

How to avoid falls in the home – information for older people

Local authority

You can find your local council's telephone number in the phone book. Write it in this box.

For local information contact:

Help the Aged is a Registered charity No. 272786



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Older people have a right to expect the highest possible quality of life. Sadly, a lot of older people trip, slip or fall, and falling can badly damage a person's quality of life.

This booklet gives you some simple advice on how to avoid these falls.

Be safe ...

Be careful ...

Be independent ...



Looking after yourself

Keep your body active

You are more likely to fall if you have weak muscles and poor balance. A good way to make your muscles stronger and to improve your balance is to take regular exercise.

Some good forms of physical exercise are:

- walking
- light gardening and housework
- keep-fit classes
- T'ai Chi classes (but check that the teacher has worked with older people before).

Regular exercise is also good for easing the pain and swelling arthritis causes – so is massage.



Before you start

Speak to your doctor first if you are not used to taking physical exercise. Then:



- start gently (don't overdo it)
- build up slowly
- don't try to do more than you feel comfortable with.

Don't give up

Don't stop taking exercise just because you have had a fall – or because you are afraid of falling. If you do this, you may make it even *more* likely that you will fall.

Keep your body healthy

Make sure you eat plenty of calcium and vitamin D. You find calcium in milk, cheese and yoghurt. Try to choose the lower fat versions if you can.

Vitamin D keeps your bones strong and cuts down the risk of breaks and fractures. You find it in meat, sardines, tuna and other oily fish. Most fat spreads and breakfast cereals have vitamin D added to them.

Sunlight on the skin also produces vitamin D.

You may need to take more vitamin D if you do not eat these foods – or if you do not go out very much in the sun or remain covered up with clothes. Ask your GP or chemist for advice.



Watch what you wear

You are more likely to slip or trip if you are wearing:

- n slippers that are loose or have no back
- n sandals
- n shoes with heels
- n flared trousers
- n clothing that trails to the ground.



Wear flat shoes or shoes with thin soles or a built-in heel. Don't wear trainers, or shoes like trainers. And remember not to walk on slippery floors in socks or tights.

Ask your doctor about underwear to protect your hips.

Hip protector underwear cuts down the risk of a fracture if you fall. You should wear it day and night. It does not show up under your other clothes, and you can wash it.



Keeping an eye on your health



Wear the right glasses

Have your eyes tested regularly at least every two years. Eye tests are free to the over 60s.

Do you need glasses for reading and for distance? If you do, it is best to have two separate pairs of glasses. Bifocals or vari-focals are not as safe.

You may not need to pay the full amount for your glasses. Ask your optician for advice.

Keep steady

Do you have to take more than four kinds of medicine? If you do, ask your doctor to check them regularly. Let your doctor know if your pills are making you feel dizzy.



Don't drink alcohol when you are on medicine. The mixture can make you dizzy and can cause you to lose your balance.

Do you have arthritis in the spine or neck? If you do, you need to move your head slowly. Leaning your head back or turning your head too quickly can make you dizzy.

Ask your doctor if you can have a flu jab. Flu is an illness that can make you less steady on your feet.

Take good care of your feet, and check that they have no sore areas. Make sure that your feet are comfortable, whatever you wear on them.

Let a friend or neighbour know if you are feeling unwell.

Making your home safer

You can make small changes in your home and cut down accidents. You could:

- n fit a letterbox cage to save bending down
- n put 100 watt light bulbs in the kitchen and stairways so they are brightly lit
- n use long-life bulbs so you do not have to change them so often
- n paint the outer edge of steps with non-slip white paint
- n use non-slip mats under rugs, in the kitchen, on stair landings, and inside and next to the bath
- n have handrails by the toilet and bath and on the stairs
- n make carpets safer by repairing or removing any frayed edges
- n take the casters off any furniture that you use to lean on or hold on to.



Cut down the risks in your daily life

When you get out of bed

Getting out of bed, or getting up from a chair you have been sitting in for a long time, can be a problem. If you stand up too quickly, your blood pressure can drop suddenly. This can make you light-headed.

Try to stand up in slow stages. When you get up from a chair, try to tense your arms and legs a few times first. A wedge pillow will raise the head of the bed and make it easier for you to get out of bed.



When you go to the toilet at night

Don't use a torch if you need to go to the toilet in the night. Turn on a light. Hold on to something secure if you need to bend.

Think about ways to make your house safer

- n Make sure there are no wires or other clutter on stairs or places where you walk.
- n See if you can get someone else to change curtains or light bulbs for you.
- n Store things you use a lot in places you can get to easily.
- n Spread salty sand on wet or icy steps.
- n Mop up any spills at once.
- n If you are going to use steps to reach something, make sure they are non-slip with a safety chain and handrail.



Other things to think about

- n More telephone extensions around the home will stop you rushing to answer the phone. Cordless ones are particularly useful as you can leave the handsets in convenient places. An answer machine might be even better.
- n A personal fall alarm system can be a comfort to you and your family. Find out more about these systems by ringing Age Concern's Information Line (see the back of this leaflet).
- n Try to keep your home warm. Cold muscles work less well and may lead to accidents and injuries.
- n If you have a pet, fit a brightly coloured collar, so that you can see it more easily and are less likely to trip over it.



If you have a fall, try to...

...get help

Try not to panic if you have a fall. Don't move if you feel pain or know that you have hurt yourself. Try to attract attention. Bang on the wall or floor to get your neighbour's attention. Use your personal fall alarm system if you have one. Phone the emergency services, or a neighbour, friend or relative.



...get up

A lot of older people have problems after they fall, even when they have not hurt themselves. This is because they lie on the ground for a long time after falling – and this 'long lie' can lead to hypothermia and pneumonia. If you cannot get anyone to help you, try to use furniture to help yourself up. Crawl to a sturdy chair. Use the chair for support, and get up from your knees. Sit on the chair for a while before you stand up.

...keep warm

If you cannot get up on your own you need to keep warm, tense your leg and arm muscles regularly and find a coat, jacket, tablecloth or anything else to use as a blanket.

After a fall

You should tell your doctor about any fall. You should certainly tell them if you were unable to get up off the floor on your own.

Getting more help

Tell your doctor about any falls you have. He or she will be able to tell how the problem can be treated.

Local councils' care and repair schemes and Age Concern will give you advice in private on:

- n how to prevent falls
- n what your welfare rights are
- n what benefits you are allowed



These services may also help you pay for safety equipment and some will do a free check of your home for safety and security. Help the Aged, Age Concern and some local authorities will give money to some older people to help them buy a fall alarm.

What about broken bones ?

As we get older, broken bones caused by a minor bump or fall [fragility fractures] are likely to be due to osteoporosis. Ninety per cent of people who break their hip do so following a fall. If you have already had a fall, or have any of the following risk factors for osteoporosis, speak to your doctor about treatments to strengthen your bones:

- n long term use of corticosteroid tablets
- n early menopause [before the age of 45]
- n testosterone deficiency in men
- n low body weight or have a very slight build
- n smoking
- n previous fragility fracture

Useful contacts

If you have any problems making contact with social services or voluntary groups, ask a family member or a friend to help you.

■ Help The Aged – Senior Line 0808 800 65 65

Help The Aged
207– 221
Pentonville Road
London
N1 9UZ

- n Monday to Friday from 9.00am to 4.00pm.
- n A free national advice service for older people and their carers.
- n Will give you advice on welfare and disability rights, housing and community care.

■ Age Concern Information Line 0800 00 99 66

Freepost (SWB30375)
Ashburton
Devon
TQ13 7ZZ

- n Seven days a week from 7.00am to 7.00pm.
- n A free helpline for older people and their carers.
- n Will give you information on money, health, community care, housing, transport, heating, education and other issues.

■ Research into Ageing 020 7278 1114

207– 221
Pentonville Road
London
N1 9UZ

- n A national medical research charity.
- n Aims to prevent the major causes of disability in later life and to improve the treatment of older people.
- n Will send booklets and videos on exercise if you make a donation to the charity.

■ National

**Osteoporosis
Society 01761 471**

- n Monday to Friday from 9.00 am to 5.30 pm
- n Helpline for information on osteoporosis prevention and treatment.

To order more copies of this leaflet please call **0870 1502 500**