

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 unfortunately gets higher. Physical injury, such as 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, but some falls risks can be reduced:

- Talk to your doctor or a health care professional
- Have your medications reviewed by your doctor or pharmacist
- Have your vision and hearing checked regularly and update your prescriptions
- Keep your home safe
- Talk to your family and friends, enlist the help of others
- Find out about strength and balance exercise classes in your community.

Introduction

This booklet will outline measures that you can take to help yourself. It will reinforce advice and information given to you by your health care professionals.

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



Why do I fall?

There are three main reasons why people fall:



- Many changes occur in our bodies as we get older eg. balance, strength, vision, hearing, medication
- Some falls are due to environmental hazards such as tripping on loose carpets, spills on the floor
- Some falls are down to our behaviour eg. rushing around, getting up suddenly or in the dark.

Who can help me reduce my risk of falling?

- Nurse/Doctor**
 - Will investigate causes of falling
 - Review medication, advise you on your care and make referrals for you to see other health professionals.
- Physiotherapist**
 - Will assess your strength, balance and walking
 - Teach you appropriate exercises.
- Occupational Therapist**
 - Will advise you about equipment/ adaptations to increase your safety awareness and independence at home. Will help you regain your confidence and reduce your fear of falling.
- Podiatrist/ Chiropodist**
 - Will help relieve painful feet and provide advice on footwear and footcare to reduce the risk of falling.
- Social Worker**
 - Will provide information to help you live independently
 - Can advise you about benefits and services available to you.
- Dietitian**
 - Will provide you with information and advice on a healthy diet.

Other people who can help you are staff from the Trust's Promoting Wellbeing Teams, Home Safety Officers based in the council, Opticians, Pharmacists, family, carers and neighbours.

What can I do to help myself?

1. Make Your Home Safer

- Remove clutter from floors and stairways
- Lift all loose mats
- Avoid trailing flexes - telephone/electrical wires
- Ensure your furniture arrangement allows enough space for you to walk safely
- Have easy grip handrails on outdoor steps and both sides of stairs where possible
- Keep stairs and outdoor steps well lit, turn on a light when rising at night
- Avoid wet or icy steps or paths
- Dry up spills straight away.



2. Look After Your Eyes

- Have your eyes examined every two years (eye examinations are free after 60) or every year if you are over 70. Keep your glasses clean and within reach.



What can I do to help myself?



3. Take Care with Your Day to Day Activities

- Sit down to wash and dress
- Do not wear trailing clothing or nightwear
- Get up from a chair or bed slowly to avoid dizziness
- Always use a non-slip bath or shower mat
- Have handrails fitted 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 or touch lamp and wear your helpline
- Consider equipment and safety aids that can help. The website www.askSARA.org.uk can help you see types of aids that are available and where to buy them.

4. Look After Your Feet and Wear Appropriate Shoes

- Wear well fitting shoes - lace up style
- Avoid slippers that are loose or have no back
- Avoid high heels
- Consider the weather conditions, terrain and activity.



What can I do to help myself?

5. Keep Active

Older adults should aim to be active daily and minimise the time spent sitting for long periods.

- Adults over 65 years of age who are at risk of falls should incorporate exercises to improve strength and balance at least twice a week
- Strength and balance exercises will improve your balance and muscle strength as well as your general fitness and wellbeing
- There are free exercise opportunities in both hospitals and leisure centres for older adults. Please contact the Falls Coordinator for more information on **T: 028 3756 4909**.



6. Look after Your Health

- Keep your vaccinations up to date
- Take extra care when you are unwell - don't be afraid to ask for help
- Take only medication prescribed by your doctor at the correct dosage and the correct time. Your pharmacist can make up a medicine box for the week
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review your medication.

What can I do to help myself?

7. Seek Advice for Bladder Problems

- Contact your doctor or nurse about any difficulties you are experiencing eg. incontinence.



8. Keeping Help at Hand

- Consider an alarm to enable you to get help in an emergency. Always carry a mobile phone or cordless phone with you so that you can reach help
- Wear your pendant or wrist band at all times everywhere you go both in the home and if outside in the garden
- Let your family members or neighbours know where you are.



9. Diet

- Eat a healthy balanced diet that contains plenty of fruit, vegetables and drink lots of fluid to keep yourself hydrated. Calcium and Vitamin D are important for strong bones. If your appetite is poor or you notice you are losing weight speak with your doctor.





What Should I Do if I Fall?

- Don't panic - try to stay calm
- Assess the situation - if you are hurt or unable to get up follow **THE REST and WAIT PLAN**.

THE REST and WAIT PLAN

Try to summon help:

- Use a pendant alarm or phone to contact family or emergency services. Call 999
- Bang on the wall
- Call out for help
- Crawl towards your phone
- Move to a soft surface such as carpet.

Keep warm:

- Try to reach for something to cover yourself with
- 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.

If you need to empty your bladder while on the floor, use a newspaper or item of clothing to soak up the wet, and move away from the wet area.

What Should I Do if I Fall?

If you are unhurt and know that you are able to get up follow **THE UP AND ABOUT PLAN** below.

The UP and ABOUT PLAN:



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. Turn and sit. Rest for a while before getting up.

Don't ignore a fall. Always tell family or a health care professional about it. There are staff and local services available to help you.

Useful Contacts

If you have had a fall in the past or are concerned that you might have a fall in the future there are services that can help. There is a Falls Coordinator in the SHSCT who you can contact for information on:

- Local Falls Clinics across the SHSCT - which provide assessment and treatment to reduce your risk of falling
- Strength and Balance exercise classes in hospitals or local leisure centres.

T: 028 3756 4909 for the Falls Coordinator

The Access and Information Service can give you information on many other services and staff who work for the Trust or those who work in statutory, voluntary or community organisations based within the Southern Trust area.

T: 028 3756 4300 Monday to Friday 9am-5pm.

If calling outside of these hours please call the Regional Emergency Social Work Service on **T: 028 9504 9999**.



www.southerntrust.hscni.net/falls