



Falls Prevention



Advice Booklet

Working together to prevent falls

Contact

**For further information or
advice please contact:-**

Falls Prevention Service

tel: (028) 9263 3705

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Content

	Page No
Introduction	1
Exercise and physical activity	2
Your bone health	3
Manage your medicines	4
Check your environment for hazards	5
Bladder problems	7
Have your eyesight checked regularly	7
Looking after your feet	8
What should I do if I fall?	9
Pendant alarm	11
Your health and wellbeing	11
Referral form for Falls Prevention Service	12

Introduction

Falls are a common occurrence for many individuals. The incidence of falls increase as people get older, mainly because of long term health problems which increase the risk of falling. Falling is not simply a consequence of ageing.

If you fall, you are advised to **report the fall to your doctor** so that the cause of the fall can be investigated. Many falls may seem to be a simple trip, but there can be other factors present which explain why you fell and therefore treatment may be available.

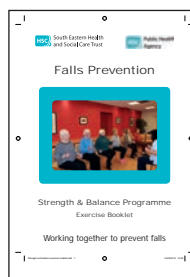
There have been many risk factors identified which increase the risk of falling, The more risk factors you have the higher your risk of falling. The good news is that many of these risk factors can be modified and therefore reduce the risk of you having a fall. This booklet will explain some of the actions you can take yourself to reduce your risks.

There is no intention for this general advice to be a substitute for additional professional advice as part of individualised and tailored care.

Exercise and physical activity

It is recommended that people of all ages should be physically active on a daily basis. For those over the age of 65 years this should add up to 2½ hours over the course of a week, with 10 minutes of activity or more for each session. Physical activity can be any activity that causes you to breathe harder and make you feel warmer, for example dancing, tai chi, gardening, carrying shopping or brisk walking.

One of the most effective ways to reduce your risk of falls is to participate in **strength and balance exercise** on at least 2 days per week. For many people they are weak due to not using their muscles often enough. This is reversible with exercise. Similarly your balance can be retrained and improved with specific exercises. Inactivity significantly increases the likelihood of you falling.



Strength and balance exercises should be individually prescribed for you to challenge your balance and strengthen your muscles. Please contact the Falls Prevention Service about local classes, individual sessions or for further information.



Physiotherapy

If you have significant problems with your balance and/or walking, it is recommended that you are assessed by a Physiotherapist.

Your bone health

Osteoporosis is a condition resulting from a loss of bone density. This results in more fragile bones that will break more easily, often as a result of a fall. There are a number of risk factors for osteoporosis, for example close family history of osteoporosis, smoking, heavy use of alcohol, long term use of corticosteroids, early menopause in women, long term immobility, previous fractured bone (for example wrist or spine) and certain medical conditions. If you are concerned that you may be at risk of osteoporosis you should discuss this with your doctor.

What you can do to help keep your bones healthy:-

Food

Eat a variety of foods to ensure a balanced diet to keep healthy. Include foods rich in calcium and vitamin D. Calcium rich foods include milk, cheese and yoghurt. We need 3 portions from this food group daily eg. $\frac{1}{3}$ pint of milk, 30g cheese, 1 carton of yoghurt. Some foods do contain vitamin D eg. oily fish, fortified cereal and margarines. However, most of our vitamin D comes from sunlight. People over 65, those who are housebound, avoid the sun or have darker coloured skin are advised to take a vitamin D supplement of 10 micrograms per day.

Exercise

You can grow stronger bones by taking regular exercise which involves weight-bearing. This means any exercise where you are supporting the weight of your own body eg. strength and balance exercise (page 2), dancing, tai chi.

Stop smoking

You can contact Trust Stop Smoking Service Coordinator for further information on local support available. Tel: (028) 9151 1134 or (028) 9250 1383.

Manage your medicines

Some medicines can cause side effects which can make you feel dizzy, drowsy or unsteady and result in a fall. To reduce the risk of a fall, if you experience any of these symptoms or take 4 or more different medications each day, ask your doctor or pharmacist to review your medications. You should only take medications as they have been prescribed. If you are unsure about any of your medicines, ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.

Mixing alcohol and medicines can be harmful. Alcohol, like some medicines, can make you sleepy, drowsy, or lightheaded. Drinking alcohol while taking medicines can intensify these effects. Combining alcohol with some medicines can lead to falls and serious injuries, especially among older people.

If you're taking prescription drugs and are unsure whether it is safe to drink alcohol, the best advice is to check with your doctor and the pharmacist. Also check the leaflet that comes with the medication.



Home Environment Checklist

Many falls are caused by hazards within and around your own home. The following checklist can be used to identify potential risks and how you/friend/relative/professional may address them:-

Stairs

- [] Do not place objects on the stairs
- [] Have a professional install easy grip handrails on either side of the stairs
- [] Unless you use your walking aid on the stairs eg. stick, do not attempt to carry it up and down - keep one for upstairs and another for downstairs
- [] Ensure you have good lighting - use high wattage bulbs

Bathroom

- [] Have a professional install grab rails by the toilet, bath and shower
- [] Use non slip mats in the bath and shower
- [] Mop up any water/spillages as soon as possible

All Rooms

- [] Replace worn or damaged carpet or flooring
- [] Avoid patterned floor surfaces
- [] Remove all loose mats
- [] Avoid trailing leads/wires - consider a cordless telephone
- [] Arrange your furniture so you are easily able to walk around/use your walking aid
- [] Ensure you have good lighting - use high wattage bulbs, put lights on at night

Outdoors

- [] Have broken or uneven pathways and driveways repaired
- [] Remove leaves and other debris
- [] Have a professional install handrails on any steps
- [] Paint the outer edge of steps with non-slip white paint
- [] Have salt spread on icy pathways/avoid walking in icy conditions if possible
- [] Ensure you have good lighting

Other advice

- [] Avoid long trailing clothing
- [] Use a helping hand aid to avoid bending or over stretching
- [] Be aware of small children or pets that could cause you to trip
- [] Replace ferrules on your walking aid if the treads are worn down

Occupational Therapy

An occupational therapist can advise you on equipment or adaptations to increase safety and independence in your home. For example if you are having difficulty using your shower, getting dressed or preparing a meal.

The Home Safety Check Scheme is a free service provided across the Eastern Area Councils which aims to reduce accidents in the home such as; falls, burns, scalds, poison and fire.

For further information or to arrange a home assessment:

Ards and North Down Borough Council:

0300 013 3333 Ext 40336

homesafety@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

Newry, Mourne & Down District Council:

0300 013 2233

Lisburn & Castlereagh Borough Council:

(028) 9250 9250

Home.Safety@lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk

Bladder problems

Incontinence increases the risk of falling as you rush to the toilet. It is important not to reduce your fluid intake (6-8 glasses per day) to manage this problem. If you are experiencing any new problems you should contact your doctor or district nurse so that you can receive appropriate advice, treatment and/or continence products. At night it is worth considering having a commode or urinal by the bed.

Have your eyesight checked regularly

Good vision has a very important role in how you maintain your balance. You are advised to have your eyesight checked by an optician every 2 years or sooner if you notice a change in your vision or your optician has advised otherwise eg glaucoma risk. Eye tests are FREE for everyone over the age of 60. If you are unable to get to the optician some opticians will do a home visit. Check with your preferred service. Alternatively you could consider

Optimise is a local service providing eye care for anyone who finds it difficult to attend a practice. ☎ (028) 9182 7780

If you wear bifocals or varifocals you need to take extra care as it can affect your perception of objects and therefore cause you to lose your balance and fall. You should discuss your options with your optician.



Looking after your feet

Looking after feet can help to prevent problems such as corns, calluses and ingrown toenails that can make you unsteady on your feet and at risk of a fall. If you have a problem on your feet a HCPC registered podiatrist can offer treatment and advice.

Footwear can be a major contributing factor to falls. The Footwear affects the way we walk. Good fitting, supportive footwear can improve walking whereas poor fitting or unsupportive footwear can result in a fall. Follow the advice below for the ideal shoe.

When buying new shoes:

- Buy in the afternoon
- Measure both feet
- Stand up to fit
- Break the shoes in slowly
- Never wear new shoes all day.
- Check your feet for any sore areas when removing the shoes

The Ideal Shoe

Size Ensure your shoes are the correct length. Get your feet measured as the length of the foot can change as you get older.	Width Check that the shoe is wide enough and doesn't squash the toes together	Depth Ensure that the shoe is deep enough at the toe box and doesn't cause rubbing on the toes
Fastening Laced or Velcro fastenings will hold your foot firmly into the shoe	Heel Counter. A firm Heel counter will help hold the foot firmly in the shoe. Loose shoes and slippers with soft heel counters can cause falls	Heel Height and Sole The heel should be no higher than 30mm (1¼ "). The sole should be wide at the heel and be made of a non-slip material.

You can get further advice on shoes or problems with your feet from a HCPC registered podiatrist.

What should I do if I fall?

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

1. *Try to summon help*

- Use a pendant alarm if you have one
- Bang on the wall
- Call out for help
- Crawl towards your phone.

2. *Keep Warm*

- Try to reach for something to cover yourself eg blanket, dry towel, clothing, cushions
- Try to move out of draughts
- Move off cold tile flooring.

3. *Keep Moving*

- Do not lie in the same position for too long as you may get cold or develop a pressure sore
- Roll from side to side and move your arms and legs if possible.

After a fall

Remember after a fall you should always tell your doctor.

If you are unhurt and know you are able to get up, follow:-

The Up and About Plan

1. Roll onto hands and knees and crawl to a stable piece of furniture such as a bed, stool or chair.
2. With hands on the support, place one foot flat on the floor bending your knee in front of your tummy.
3. Lean forwards, push on your hands and foot and bring your other foot onto the ground.
4. Turn and sit onto the surface.
5. Rest for a while before getting up.



Pendant alarm

A pendant alarm can be worn around the neck or as a wrist band. In the event of an emergency such as a fall, you press the button which connects to a dedicated call centre 24 hours a day. The centre will get in contact with your chosen contacts or the emergency services to make sure someone comes to help you.

Pendants can be purchased from many different providers.

Age NI Personal Alarm: 0808 100 4545 / Careline 01706 232 085
www.ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland
Fold Telecare 03301 230 888

Your health and wellbeing

In addition to the advice in the previous sections, the following advice is aimed at keeping you safe and healthy:-

- Get the flu and pneumonia vaccine each year
- Take extra care when you are unwell
- Get a friend to test your smoke alarm weekly
- Drink plenty of fluids throughout the day to avoid dehydration which can cause falls
- Remember to have a variety of foods and a regular meal pattern to keep healthy.

For more information on many local services please visit the Trust healthy living website where you can access the Directory of Service for Older People www.setrust.hscni.net/healthyliving/2309.htm



Falls Prevention Service Referral Form

You can refer yourself to the Falls Prevention Service if:

- Aged 65 years or over
- Live in the South Eastern HSC Trust area (not residential/nursing home)
- Have had a fall in the last 12 months or you are concerned about falling.

Name	
Address	
Post Code	
Home Telephone Number	
Mobile Telephone Number	
Date of Birth	
Health & Care Number (if known)	
GP	
How have you become aware of the service?	GP () Pharmacist () Optometrist/Optician () District nurse () Friend/relative () Other Please specify _____
If you have fallen in the last 12 months, how many times?	
Do you require an interpreter: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Language:	

Please send completed referral form to:

Trust Falls Coordinator
 First Floor
 Old Psychiatry Building
 Lagan Valley Hospital
 Hillsborough Road
 Lisburn
 BT28 1JP

This form can also be accessed at: www.setrust.hscni.net



Whilst every effort is made to ensure that the information given in this document is accurate, no legal responsibility is accepted for any errors, omissions or misleading statements.

