

Steady Steps

to Staying
Active
for Life

Reducing the
risk of falls



Swindon Falls
and Bone Health
Collaborative

NHS
Bath and North East Somerset,
Swindon and Wiltshire
Clinical Commissioning Group



SWINDON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Contents

→	Welcome	3
→	Challenging stereotypes	4
→	Keeping active	5
→	Good nutrition	6
→	Good mental health	7
→	Vaccination and screening	8
→	Medication	8
→	Am I at risk of a fall?	9
→	Checklist 1	10
→	Reducing the risk of falling	11
→	Staying safe at home	15
→	Checklist 2	16
→	Staying safe when going out	17
→	Exercises for strength and balance	18
→	If you do fall...	20
→	Helping to prevent other people falling	24
→	Checklist 3	25
→	Some key things to remember: Take CARE and stay steady	26

Welcome

This booklet is about giving you some hints and tips to keep active and healthy which will also reduce your risk of falling.

It is for everyone regardless of your age and provides information as well as practical advice. Keeping safe, healthy and independent at home will help you enjoy life and make the most of it.

The first few chapters are general tips on physical and mental health and then there is information on reducing the risk of falling and what to do if you fall.



Challenging stereotypes

I'm too old to exercise.

No one is too old! Exercise that's appropriate for how healthy you are will benefit you throughout your life. If you are trying something new then talk to the instructor if it's a group or check with your GP or health professional if you have any concerns.

Walking isn't proper exercise.

Any exercise is good for you. Regular walking has been shown to reduce the risk of chronic illnesses, and it is a type of exercise that is free and available to everyone. Start slowly and try to increase walking gradually.

Falling is an inevitable part of getting older.

Not necessarily. Experts believe the vast majority of falls could be prevented with some simple changes to our lifestyle and homes. Medically speaking though, falls are often a warning sign that something isn't quite right – it's often something quite treatable.

I am only at risk of falling if I am really frail.

Not at all. One in three people over 65 – plenty of them in good health – will have a fall this year. However, it's true that our risk of falling increases as we age: half of all people over 80 will fall at least once a year.

I am only at risk of falling outside my home.

Some hazards are everyday things at home – an extension lead, a pet or someone else moving a bag to where you don't expect it can all increase the risk of a fall.



If I fall I'll just get up and carry on.

Hopefully you will. But it might be useful to know the best way to get up (that's covered in this booklet) and also, just in case you can't get up straight away, there are some tips on what to have around your home to keep warm and call for help.

Keeping active

Being active keeps people healthier and reduces your risk of falling. Between the ages of 50 and 70, we lose about 30% of our muscle strength and regular physical activity can strengthen muscles, whatever your age.

Being active should help with:

- ✓ **Stamina** which can help people walk longer distances, swim, play with grandchildren or mow the lawn.
- ✓ **Strength** which can help you climb stairs, carry shopping, rise from a chair and open jars.
- ✓ **Flexibility** to help you bend, get in and out of a car, wash your hair and get dressed.
- ✓ **Balance** helps you to walk and climb steps confidently, stand from a sitting position and respond quickly if you trip.

Older adults aged 65 or older, who are generally fit and have no health conditions that limit their mobility, should try to be active every day and should do at least 150 minutes (or 2½ hours) of moderate* aerobic activity such as cycling or walking every week. You should also do strength exercises on two or more days a week that work all the major muscles (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest,

shoulders and arms). The moderate activity can be any combination for example:

- **30 minutes on 5 days a week, or**
- **an hour 2-3 times a week.**

“
It makes me feel 20 years younger
”

Sitting for too long is also not good for keeping healthy and building muscle strength, so you should try to break up long periods of sitting with light activity, no matter how much exercise you do. You could do this by reducing the time you spend watching TV, by getting up to make a cup of tea, walking up and down the stairs or doing some housework. If you are watching TV, roll your shoulders regularly and get up and walk about in every ad break or between programmes.

* moderate means activity where you breathe heavier, get warm but still can hold a conversation.

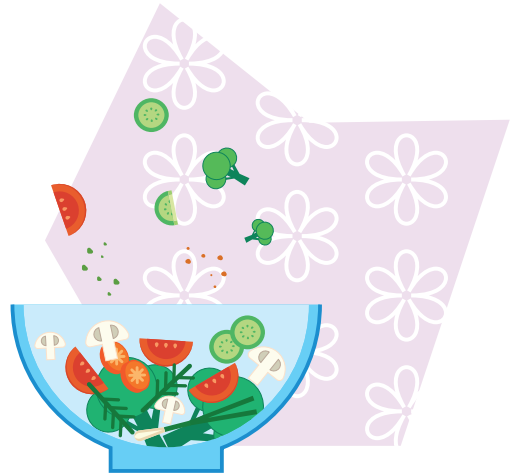
For more information see

www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-older-adults



In Swindon there are lots of activities available in the community to get involved in. These include walking groups, bowling, walking netball or walking football, dancing, yoga, tai chi, swimming and cycling. Tai Chi is particularly good as there is evidence that it can improve balance in older adults and reduce the risk of a fall. Information is available on line at <https://localoffer.swindon.gov.uk>, or from your GP or health care professional, at leisure centres, community halls, libraries, via community magazines and by talking to friends or neighbours.

“
It has improved my mobility, balance, posture, strength and wellbeing
”



Good nutrition

Being a healthy weight is a balance between how active we are and what we eat. It's not good to be either overweight or underweight. You may feel less hungry if you do less, for health reasons or as you get older.

But it's still important to have a healthy balanced diet.

Tips include:

- Enjoy all foods as part of a healthy balanced diet.
- Eat a variety of different foods.
- Eat regularly throughout the day.

- Eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day, to make sure you get all of the vitamins and minerals.
- Eat protein containing foods, like meat, fish, dairy or vegetarian alternatives (like tofu or pulses) twice a day to keep up muscle strength.
- Good sources of dietary calcium are found in milk, yoghurt and cheese and tinned bony fish like sardines, especially if you eat the bones.
- Try to have low fat versions of dairy food e.g. half fat cheese and low fat yoghurt. If you do not have dairy food, try non-dairy milks that are fortified with calcium e.g. soya. You need to check the label to see if it is fortified.

It's also important to keep your mouth and gums healthy by brushing teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and by visiting your dentist regularly for a check-up. There's good advice about dental health on the NHS Choices website.

www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/dental-health



“I am 92 years old and never thought I could feel so good and have the opportunity to meet new friends”

Good mental health

Good mental wellbeing is important for everyone and satisfaction with life is shown to be an important predictor of healthy ageing. The five ways to wellbeing developed by the New Economics Foundation is a useful tool to feeling good:

- Connect – connect with the people around you: your family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. This could involve talking to someone new, phoning an old friend or putting five minutes aside to find out how someone really is.
- Be active – have a walk each day if you can or do the exercises in this booklet each day. Find an activity that you enjoy and make it a part of your life.
- Keep learning – learning new skills can give you a sense of achievement and a new

confidence. Local colleges or community organisations offer a range of courses or there may be a craft or gardening group in your local area.

- Give to others – even the smallest act can count, whether it's a smile, a thank you or a kind word. Larger acts, such as volunteering at your local community centre, can improve your mental wellbeing and help you build new social networks.
- Be mindful – be more aware of the present moment, including your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you. Think about what gives you pleasure and try and do more of it.

Vaccination and screening

Seasonal flu vaccinations are offered to everyone aged 65 or over or people with a long term condition every year. This is because they are more susceptible to developing serious health complications from flu. At age 65 people are also offered a single pneumococcal vaccine which will protect you from pneumonia for life. It is important to have these for your own health but also if you are looking after others. A shingles vaccination is also available for people when they reach 70.

Bowel cancer screening is also offered from age 60 to 69 and breast cancer screening up to age 70; spotting problems at an early stage means they can be treated earlier and there is a better chance of a good outcome.

Medication

Many people take medication either short term for an acute condition or for many years. Make sure you get your medicines reviewed regularly and if you have any concerns or feel any side effects talk to your pharmacist or GP. Keep a list of all your medications and how often you take them.



Am I at risk of a fall?

Everyone is more at risk of a fall as they get older. Falls can cause physical injuries but there can also be an impact on how you feel: making you feel less confident and leading you to worry more about going out on your own.

While we can't get younger, we can understand what puts us at risk, and make changes to reduce that risk. **One of the biggest risk factors for a fall is if you have fallen before in the last 12 months.** Other things that can increase your risk include:

- ◆ Fear of falling.
- ◆ Balance or mobility problems.
- ◆ Foot pain.
- ◆ Infections (e.g. urine, chest).
- ◆ Some medications.
- ◆ Other conditions such as cardiovascular disease, stroke or diabetes.

The advice that follows is for everyone – really useful for those who have fallen but also helpful for anyone as they get older and also for people who care for someone who may be at risk.

If you work with older people or care for someone who may be at risk, this booklet is full of useful conversation starters – just think, advice about a night time light today may reduce the risk of a fall tomorrow.

Throughout the booklet are some checklists to make you think about what is most useful and relevant for you or someone you care for. Take a look at each one and see how many you or they tick. Then read the following pages to find out why our falls risk increases as we get older – and the different things we can all do to reduce the risk whatever our age.



Checklist 1

- I have fallen before and not told anyone.
- I take quite a few different types of medication (more than 4 a day).
- I often need to get up in the night to go to the loo.
- I would like to be more active.
- I struggle with basic maintenance on my home.
- My eyesight seems to be getting worse.
- I sometimes feel weak (or dizzy) when I get up from a chair or the bed.
- A bit of clutter has built up at home over the years.
- I am not always that warm at home.
- I probably don't drink enough fluids (1.6 litres/3 pints a day for women; 2 litres/3.5 pints for men).
- My slippers have that 'lived-in' look or don't fit me properly.
- Taking care of my feet is quite difficult these days.
- I have a long-term condition such as Parkinson's, heart disease/stroke, arthritis, COPD, diabetes, dementia.
- I save electricity by turning off unnecessary lights.
- My alcohol intake is probably more than the GPs' recommended limits (2-3 units a day for women, 3-4 for men).
- I don't get out as much as I'd like because I worry about falling over.
- I often get my feet tangled up in things that could trip me; my pets or grandchildren running around can make me feel unsteady.
- I am getting more forgetful.
- There is a history of osteoporosis in my family.



Reducing the risk of falling

As well as keeping active and having a healthy balanced diet there are a number of other things that help reduce the risk of a fall.

Improving balance

We rely on our balance to stay upright when we reach for something or trip up. But as we get older, our balance reaction times are not as quick and we react more slowly. That makes it harder to regain balance, if we wobble or become unsteady.

There are some simple exercises you can do regularly to improve your balance: see **pages 18-19**. At any age doing yoga, tai chi or dancing can build strength and flexibility – there are lots of classes in leisure centres and community halls – information about these can be found on the internet or in libraries or local notice boards.

There may also be balance classes you can attend – check out the Swindon Local Offer website to see what is available in Swindon, discuss your concern with your doctor, or phone the Live Well Swindon Hub on 01793 465513 or email livewell@swindon.gov.uk.

<https://localoffer.swindon.gov.uk>



“
Working on my balance has definitely improved my walking independently
”

Bones and Nutrition

As we get older, our bones become less dense and so are more likely to break. If you do fall, there is increased risk of a fracture. This can happen earlier for people who have osteoporosis.

Weight-bearing activities, such as walking, are great for protecting your bones, and a healthy balanced diet will help ensure you get enough calcium to keep your bones strong. Follow the nutrition tips on **page 6** to keep your bones healthy. If you are underweight, try to increase your weight as being underweight can put you at increased risk of osteoporosis.

If you don't get outside into the sunlight you are at more risk of low Vitamin D levels, which helps the body absorb calcium. Adults who have little or no exposure to sunlight should take a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D throughout the year. Adults from minority ethnic groups with dark skin, such as those of African, African-Caribbean or South Asian origin, might not get enough vitamin D from sunlight – so they should consider taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D throughout the year.

If you get out into the sunshine, during autumn and winter it is still good to take a daily vitamin D supplement (10 micrograms) as the sun is not strong enough for your body to produce enough Vitamin D. Vitamin D supplements can be bought from a pharmacy or health food store. Sunlight exposure without sunscreen should be limited to 10 minutes per day on the arms and face between late March/April and the end of September. You can go out in the sun for longer with sunscreen but avoid the peak heat of the day.

If you smoke then stopping smoking can also help with bone strength. There's lots of help available via the local stop smoking service or through your GP or pharmacy.



Eyesight and hearing

As people get older, eye sight can change. This may affect how clearly people see but it can also make it more difficult to see contrasts (for example the edges of steps and kerbs), alter depth-perception and cause visual field disturbances – all of which make you more likely to fall. Did you know that 60-year-old eyes need three times more light than 20-year-old eyes?

It's important to have a sight test every year, even if you think you're fine (it's free for over-60s). This is so things can be picked up early.

If you smoke, try to stop as this can increase the risk of developing age-related macular degeneration and cataracts.

Checking hearing is also important so think about booking a hearing test too.

Alcohol

As we get older, drinking the same amount results in higher blood alcohol concentration. This is because fat replaces muscle as we age, and alcohol is not drawn into body fat as well as it is into muscle.

Older people are more likely to experience unsteadiness after drinking alcohol, and so are more susceptible to falls.



Government guidance promotes drinking alcohol in moderation and if you feel you are drinking too much or it is becoming a habit, speak to your GP for some support. You should avoid alcohol with certain medicines so always read leaflets that come with any medicine and if in doubt, talk to your pharmacist.

Dehydration

Lack of water intake has been identified as a critical risk factor for falls in older people. It can lead to deterioration in mental state and an increase in the likelihood of dizziness and fainting.

Drinking enough water can benefit you in a number of ways:

1. Helps avoid constipation.
2. Maintains a healthy urinary tract.
3. Reduces the risk of kidney stones.
4. Stabilises blood pressure and prevents fainting.
5. Improves mental performance.
6. Keeps skin healthy and young looking.

Feet

Our feet work hard throughout our lifetime and looking after them is important. Tips include:

- Taking care of your feet – cutting toenails and using a pumice stone on hard skin. A podiatrist can help if it is difficult to reach your feet yourself.
- Replacing slippers if they get old and floppy or don't fit anymore – slippers with non-slip soles, velcro straps and backs (heel counters) are safest.
- Choosing shoes that give proper support and fit well.
- Don't shuffle when you walk – picking up your feet reduces the risk of falling.

Memory problems

Forgetting things occasionally can be a normal part of ageing. However if you notice it is happening more often or you are feeling confused you should get it checked out. Talking to your GP can put your mind at rest or if there is something wrong, allow you to get the help and support you need.



Staying safe at home

Six out of ten falls happen in the home or garden so it is important that whatever your age your home environment is safe. What is comforting clutter could also be a risk for falling. The checklist overleaf gives some tips.



Checklist 2

- Keep the stairs and landing well lit and avoid storing things on the stairs.
- Be careful of thresholds and cables which can trip you. Use cable ties to organise jumbled wires and tape trailing extension leads to skirting boards.
- Always use your bedside light when getting up at night. If you regularly get up in the night for the loo, keep a landing light on, or consider using a sensor light which will come on if it detects movement.
- Check all rugs have a non-slip underlay and replace worn ones. Consider replacing frayed carpets, or ask someone to tack them down.
- Clear away clutter, especially in the hall/landing and doorways.
- A surprising number of people trip over their pets. Buy them a bright collar, and a bell to alert you to their presence.
- Hard surfaces are very slippery when wet so wipe up any spills immediately.
- Always use a non-slip mat in the bath/shower. Make sure the flooring is safe and non-slip, and consider installing grab rails in the bathroom.
- Ensure your front and back doors and garage are well lit.
- If you find it difficult to stand up from your chair or bed, consider using furniture raises or other equipment to help you.
- Keep your paths free of moss and leaves, and tidy any outside clutter. Repair any cracks in paving.
- Can you open your doors easily? Get a handyman to ease your doors if they stick, and replace any insecure locks.
- Do you have difficulty putting your rubbish and recycling out for collection? If so, why not request an assisted collection from Swindon Borough Council.
- Install smoke alarms in the hallways and living room of your home and a heat alarm in the kitchen.
- Contact Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service who offer free Safe & Well visits. More information is available at www.dwfire.org.uk/safety/safe-and-well-visits or telephone 0800 038 2323. Or speak to your doctor about a referral to an occupational therapist.



Staying safe when going out

Going out, meeting friends, going shopping and having an active social life are all great for a happy and healthier older age – and indeed at any age. If you are concerned about falling, it's important to keep active but here are a few tips to keep safe.

- Take your time and don't rush. Check for trip hazards – cracked pavements, obstacles, uneven surfaces and changes in gradient – before walking.
- Consider using a rucksack or shopping trolley instead of carrying shopping bags – they won't obscure your view of the pavement! Look out for changes in floorings in shops or at entrances.
- Keep your bus pass/money near to hand so you can concentrate on boarding safely rather than looking for it. Don't be afraid to ask the bus driver to wait until you're seated before moving off. Some buses in Swindon have floors that can be lowered where you get on to help you and access for a shopping trolley or walker.
- Doing exercise in groups is a great way to meet people and also get out of the house. In

Swindon there are local balance and strength groups which will give practical tips and exercises tailored to all levels.

“
It is always more pleasurable to exercise in a group and the instructor is very good at keeping us on our toes
”

Walking aids

Don't feel awkward about using a walking aid if it helps you stay steady. It's important a stick is the right length: level with your wrist crease when your arm is down by your side. It should also have a rubber end ('ferrule') to stop it slipping; replace worn-out ones promptly. If a stick is no longer quite enough, think about getting a walking frame or rollator (wheeled frame). Or speak to your doctor about a referral to a physiotherapist.

Exercises for strength and balance

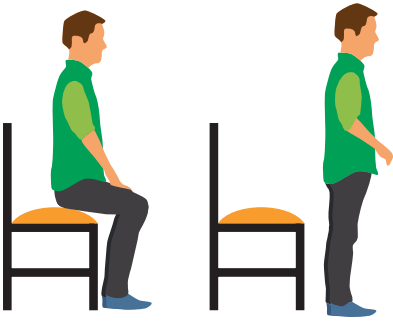
Try these six simple exercises two or three times a week – every day if you can. They have been developed by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy to help with balance and co-ordination.

- ✓ Make sure the chair you use is sturdy.
- ✓ Wear supportive shoes.
- ✓ If you experience chest pain, dizziness or severe shortness of breath, stop and call your GP or call 111 (the NHS non-emergency number).
- ✓ A slight soreness the day after is quite normal.
- ✓ There are additional home-based activities to maintain strength and balance in the Public Health England “Active at Home” booklet here <https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/resources/campaigns/50/resources/5118>.



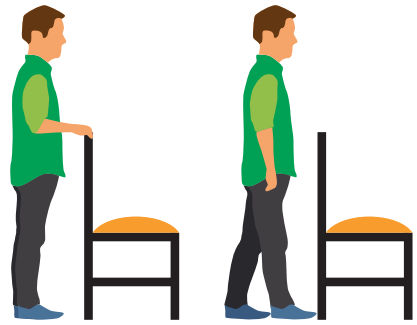
1 Heel Raises
Stand tall, holding the back of a sturdy kitchen-type chair or kitchen sink, then lift your heels off the floor, taking your weight onto your big toes. Hold for three seconds, then lower carefully. Repeat 10 times.

2 Toe Raises
Stand tall holding the same support, then raise your toes – taking your weight on your heels. Don't stick your bottom out. Hold for three seconds, then lower with control. Repeat 10 times.



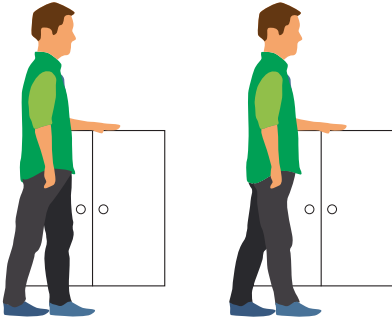
3 Sit To Stand

Sit tall near the front of a chair with your feet slightly back. Lean forwards slightly and stand up (with hands on the chair if needed). Step back until your legs touch the chair then slowly lower yourself back into the chair. Repeat 10 times.



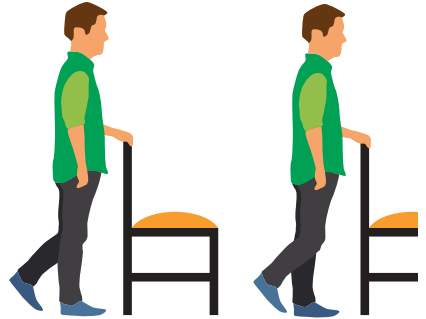
4 Heel-Toe Stand

Stand tall, with one hand on your support. Put one foot directly in front of the other to make a straight line. Look ahead, take your hand off the support and balance for 10 seconds. Take the front foot back to hip width apart. Then place the other foot in front and balance for 10 seconds.



5 Heel-Toe Walking

Stand tall, with one hand on a support like a kitchen cabinet. Look ahead and walk 10 steps forwards, placing one foot directly in front of the other so that the feet form a straight line. Aim for a steady walking action. Take the feet back to hip width apart, turn around and repeat the steps in the other direction.



6 One-Leg Stand

Stand close to your support and hold it with one hand. Balance on one leg, keeping the support knee soft and your posture upright. Hold the position for 10 seconds. Repeat on the other leg.

“*My expectations of my body are bigger and better.*”

If you do fall....

If you do have a fall, lie still, stay calm and check for injuries.

If you feel you can't get up or feel pain in your hips or back, then you need to get help.



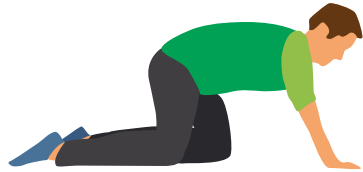


- If you have a cordless landline phone or a mobile phone, keep it in your pocket or on a belt. Programme in the phone numbers of neighbours or friends/relatives nearby who could help if you fall.
- Use your pendant alarm if you have one – Swindon Homeline offer an alarm service which is available to all Swindon residents and more information is available at <https://localoffer.swindon.gov.uk> or via 01793 464430.
- Shout or bang on the wall to get attention.
- Keep comfortable and warm – if you feel you may be vulnerable to falling you could leave cushions or blankets at key places around the house but make sure they are not a trip hazard!
- Keep moving by rolling from side to side and moving limbs if you can without pain to help keep warm and maintain circulation.
- If you can get up but require support following a fall, **phone your GP or 111** for advice. Consider registering for a pendant alarm.
- If you can't get up and / or are seriously injured, **phone 999**.

If you are unhurt and think you can get up, follow the steps below.



1. Roll onto your side then push up with your hands onto your knees.



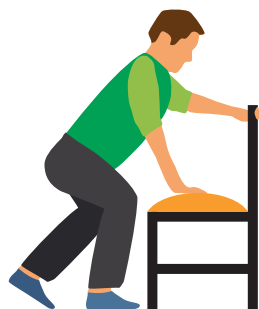
2. Crawl to a sturdy piece of furniture (if you are unable to crawl, then shuffle on your bottom).



3. Put your hands on to the sturdy piece of furniture



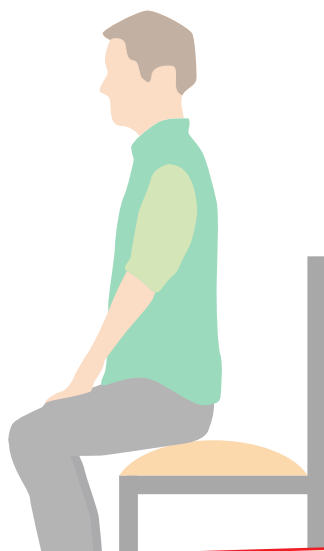
4. Bring your stronger leg up, bending your knee and placing your foot flat on the floor.



5. Lean forwards, push up and bring your other foot up so it is also flat on the floor.



6. Push up with your hands... Turn and sit on the furniture.



**Have a rest before you try and stand up.
Let your GP know that you have had a fall.**

Helping to prevent other people falling

People at risk of falls are often reluctant to discuss it because they fear their independence will be taken away from them.

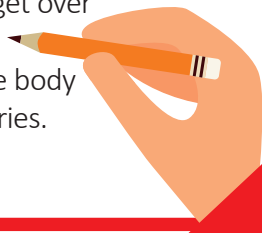
As a friend or family member we can look out for particular risks and there are also some tips if you find someone who has fallen.

Checklist 3

- ❑ Talk about falls risk in a sensitive way or using general conversations about some really good tips you've heard about.
 - ❑ Keep an eye out for potential risk factors such as eye sight getting worse, someone feeling dizzy, shuffling when walking or walking slowly. Use the tips in this booklet to make helpful suggestions.
 - ❑ Encourage them to talk to their GP about dealing with any medical problems and if they have fallen previously.
 - ❑ Give them a copy of this booklet and encourage them to carry out the actions recommended in it. Ask if they would like you to look round their home to see if you can spot and remove any obstacles or falls risks.
2. Make sure the person is as comfortable as possible – putting a pillow (or rolled up coat if outside) under their head and finding something warm to keep them covered. Get them to take slow, calm breaths.
 3. Call for help by dialling 999 if necessary if they are seriously injured or can't get up. Or dial 111 for general advice if they are not seriously injured.
 4. If you think they are uninjured and can get up, see how much of it they can do themselves using the technique on **page 22**.
 5. Try not to lift them, but if you have to and there is no other help around – and if you are fit enough – you are best off standing behind them, bending your knees, with your arms around their middle (not under their arms). Count to three together, then both stand up at the same time.

If someone has fallen:

1. Don't try to get them up straight away – unless it was a quick slip or trip and you know they are fine. They will need a few minutes, just to get over the immediate shock and for the body to signal any injuries.
6. When they're seated and you can both rest, scan them again for injuries. Tell their GP about the fall so they can make any appropriate investigations or referrals and give advice and assistance on cutting future risks.



Some key things to remember: Take **CARE** and stay steady

Check your health

- ✓ Take care of yourself.
- ✓ Keep healthy and stay active.
- ✓ Eat a balanced diet including vitamin D and calcium.
- ✓ Look after your mental health and well-being.
- ✓ Have regular eye, hearing and dental checks.
- ✓ Get your medication reviewed annually.

Adapt your home

- ✓ Simple adaptations might make life easier.
- ✓ Look out for potential hazards.
- ✓ Try and future proof your home so it works for you whatever your age.

Reduce risks

- ✓ Get repairs done promptly.
- ✓ Make sure lighting is good.
- ✓ Look after your feet.

Exercise regularly

- ✓ Be as active as you can be.
- ✓ Enjoy walking and getting outdoors.
- ✓ Add in exercise to improve balance, strength and stamina.
- ✓ Get out and make new friends at the same time.

Thanks to:

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

www.csp.org.uk

Age UK

www.ageuk.org.uk

Later life training

www.laterlifetraining.co.uk

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