

# Advice on Preventing Falls

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## Information for patients

This leaflet can be made available in other formats including large print, CD and Braille and in languages other than English, upon request.

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Falling can be a common problem but it can often be avoided if some simple advice is followed. This leaflet includes advice on what to do if you or someone else falls.

**Keep this booklet handy** so that you can be reminded of the advice.

The important thing to remember is that preventing falls is not just about the hazards around you. It is also about what you wear on your feet, what you eat, how active you are and what steps you take to prevent falls happening.

If you have had a fall or are worried about falling there are some important things to remember:

- Are you more careful with your walking, have you become slower or are doing less?
- Are you leaving the house less often or not going as far?
- Are you worried about what might happen if you fall again?

Answering yes to one or all of these questions is common and may mean you have lost some confidence. Remember there are lots of things you can do to reduce your risk of falling and improve your confidence.

This booklet is full of ideas to help increase your confidence by taking control. Keep reading to learn what you can do to help yourself.

Anyone can have a fall – you are not alone! Falling is frightening and people do feel less confident after a fall.

**If your concerns are affecting you a lot then speak to your doctor, nurse or anyone else involved in your care.**

## What can I do to help myself avoid a fall at home?

In your hall and stairway

### Do:

- keep your stairs well lit
- make sure you have at least 1 or 2 handrails on the stairs
- fit a letter cage to your door to save you bending down.

**Do not** use both hands to carry items up the stairs.

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## In your kitchen

### Do:

- make sure you have a stool or chair in the kitchen, in case you need to sit down when you get tired
- wipe up spills on the floor using a long handled mop; slippery floors can cause a fall
- keep everyday items within easy reach.

### Do not:

- reach up to high cupboards
- store everyday items too high or too low.

## In your bathroom

### Do:

- try and have someone in the house when you are in the bath or take a phone or pendant alarm with you
- use a non-slip bath mat
- make sure you have everything you need (e.g. soap, shampoo, towels, etc.) before you get into the bath
- have a stool or chair at hand in the bathroom in case you feel dizzy
- find out which bathroom equipment you can have fitted such as grab rails.

### Do not:

- lock the bathroom door
- have the water too hot
- use bath products which may make surfaces slippery.

## In your bedroom

### Do:

- make sure your bed is the right height for you – when sitting on the bed your feet should touch the floor and you should be able to stand up easily
- have a light by the bed so that it can be switched on and off easily
- try and have a telephone or pendant alarm by your bed – if you don't have a pendant alarm and would like one, contact Telecare or Care Connect (further information is available at the back of this leaflet).

## Can my home environment affect my risk?

### Heating

**Do** have your gas fire control and ignition on top of your fire.

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**Do not** worry if the controls are not on top of your fire, contact a gas advisor for help.

## Lighting

### Do:

- keep rooms and stairways well lit using as bright a light as possible
- use long life bulbs – you can leave them on longer and they can work out cheaper
- remember that long life bulbs may take a minute or so before they give full light.

## Wiring

**Do** make sure all electric wires and telephone cables are tucked away so you don't trip over them.

## Rugs

**Do** make sure rugs and loose carpets are tacked down or removed if it makes the room safer.

## Furniture

**Do** make sure furniture is sturdy and arranged so you can walk freely around your room.

**Do not** lean on furniture which could move or topple over, or use furniture as a walking aid.

## Callers

**Do** warn any planned visitors that it may take a little longer for you to answer the door. **Do not** be tempted to hurry to the door or telephone.

## What can I do to help myself avoid a fall when I go out?

### Outdoors

#### Do:

- keep your pathways clear. Contact your local council regarding any handy person schemes if you need help with small jobs
- ask your council about wheelie bin assistance schemes if you have difficulty moving your bin
- watch out for broken pavements, kerbs, uneven surfaces.

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**Do not** go out when it is icy or slippery unless it is absolutely necessary; consider how you could get your shopping and medication delivered.

## Can my clothing and footwear affect my risk?

### Clothing

**Do** wear clothing that allows your legs and feet to move freely.

**Do not** wear clothing that is too long or ill fitting.

### Footwear – care for your feet and reduce the risk of falling

As we get older, our feet often start to protest about the way we have treated them over the years so it is important to take good care of them.

#### **Do:**

- have your feet measured if possible, as shoes, boots and slippers should fit properly. As we get older the size and shape of our feet can change
- wear footwear that protects and supports your feet. Feeling safe and secure when you walk is important
- use fastenings such as laces, buckles or Velcro. They will help keep your feet inside the shoes
- wear shoes with non-slip soles, they will prevent you from slipping on some surfaces
- wear soles which are lightly padded, but not thick and spongy.
- wear shoes with soft supple uppers
- avoid high heels – flat is better
- avoid wearing slippers all day
- avoid backless footwear.

### Foot care – Good simple foot care is important.

#### **Do:**

- wash your feet daily in warm soapy water, take care to dry them well, especially in between the toes
- reduce dry or hard skin using a foot file before washing when needed
- keep your skin supple by gently massaging moisturising cream into the soles and heels of your feet daily
- trim your nails down regularly. Always cut them straight across without cutting down the sides of your nails

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- prevent your nails from getting too long and use a long handled foot file once a week.

**Do not** ignore any foot problems. They are unlikely to get better on their own. If you are in any doubt, see your doctor who may refer you to an NHS podiatrist. This is very important if you have diabetes.

### What else can I do to help myself?

#### Walking Aids

**Do:**

- make sure you use the walking aids which are provided for you
- check your walking aid for wear and tear, for example the ferrules (rubber feet) or ask for a new one if needed.

**Do not** carry objects when using a walking frame.

### Can my medication affect my risk?

Some medicines can make you more likely to fall, for example: anti-depressants, sleeping tablets and other sedatives. Sometimes tablets for blood pressure can make you feel dizzy when you stand up.

**Note: It is important you do not stop taking medication without speaking to your doctor first.**

**Do:**

- follow the instructions on the label and read the information leaflet provided. If you do not understand anything, ask your doctor or pharmacist (chemist)
- ask your pharmacist for advice before buying medicines over the counter especially if you are already taking prescribed medication
- attend your GP practice when you are asked to go for a medication review. It is important to check that medicines are working properly and not causing you any problems
- ask your GP practice about a medication review if you or someone you care for is struggling to take medicines as prescribed
- talk to your pharmacist if you have difficulty opening child-resistant tops. They may be able to give you ordinary screw tops or different packaging

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- be aware of feelings of being dizzy or very drowsy and speak to your doctor if you are concerned.

### Do not:

- change the amount you have been told to take
- take your medicine at a different time without first discussing it with your doctor
- share or give your medications to anyone else. They were prescribed for you and may be harmful to other people

### Can sight and / or hearing loss increase my risk of falling?

Patients who have sight (vision) and / or hearing loss are at increased risk of falling.

If you have difficulty with your sight:

### Do:

- remember to wear your glasses and keep them clean and in good condition
- contact your optician to ask if they can visit you if you are housebound
- take care on steps and stairs when you wear your glasses, especially if you wear bifocals or varifocals
- contact the eye department or social services for support if you are registered blind or partially sighted
- consider single vision lenses rather than varifocals or bifocals
- ask your optician if you qualify for help towards the cost of your eye test and glasses
- have your eyesight checked regularly
- remember your eyesight tests are free if you are 60 or over.

### Hearing

### Do:

- go to your GP if you have difficulty hearing
- make sure you attend your appointments with the Audiology department if you are already wearing a hearing aid.

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## What other medical conditions can increase my risk?

### Postural Hypotension or Dizziness

Postural hypotension is when your blood pressure drops when you move. This reduces the amount of blood going to your brain and can cause dizziness, falls and blackouts.

To help prevent this you should:

- see your doctor to make sure that there are no medical reasons for your symptoms
- take extra care in the morning. This is when your blood pressure is at its lowest
- raise the head of your bed with pillows so you are not sleeping flat. This will help to reduce the change in position when you sit up
- get out of bed slowly. Exercising your arms and legs before sitting up and again before standing up is often helpful
- remember to sit back down again if you feel dizzy, if possible lie flat
- not rush off when you stand up. Stand for a short period to make sure you do not feel dizzy. It may be helpful to walk on the spot before moving away from the bed or the chair
- remember that some people can have bigger drops in blood pressure after large meals. It may be helpful to have 5 or 6 smaller meals rather than 3 large meals
- try not to sit or stand in one position for too long particularly when it is hot
- move your heels up and down to encourage blood flow if you have to stand for long periods
- drink plenty of fluids throughout the day, 1½ - 2 litres are recommended daily amounts
- wear high leg support tights if you have been prescribed them.

Your doctor may prescribe you new medication or alter your existing medications.

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Keeping a healthy bladder is very important in avoiding falls.

Falls can happen when people have to rush to the toilet, or need to go frequently, particularly at night. There are a number of things you can do to keep your bladder healthy.

### Do:

- drink 6 - 8 cups of fluid per day (about 1½ - 2 litres or 3 pints). You can include water, fruit juice and squash (no added sugar), decaffeinated tea and coffee or fruit teas
- try to reduce the amount of drinks containing caffeine for example tea, coffee and cola as they can irritate the bladder
- try to avoid alcohol as it can also irritate the bladder
- try to avoid being overweight as this puts pressure on your bladder
- have a light by your bed in case you get up in the night and feel dizzy. If you find it difficult to go to the toilet at night or go frequently, a commode or urine bottle may be helpful. Ask your doctor or anyone else involved in your care for more information
- sit down on the toilet, if you feel unsteady.

There are lots of treatments you can try to help you manage your bladder problem. If you find yourself with any of the following symptoms then you should seek help:

- leaking urine
- urgency to go to the toilet
- going to the toilet often
- not emptying your bladder properly.

Speak to your doctor or nurse for more information and support. Your local continence service provides a booklet 'Urge Urinary Incontinence' for more information.

## Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a common condition where bones have become very fragile and weak making them easy to break. A broken bone (fracture) after a minor bump or fall may be an indication that your bones are weak.

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Consult your doctor or nurse if you are concerned. They can advise regarding further tests or treatment if necessary. If you are diagnosed with osteoporosis, treatments are available to help strengthen your bones.

### What I eat – does it make a difference?

Yes, what you eat does make a difference. It is important to eat a well-balanced diet which includes:

- fruit and vegetables
- bread, other cereals and potatoes
- meat, fish and alternatives
- milk and dairy products
- smaller amounts of fat and sugar.

This will help you to obtain all the protein, vitamins, minerals and other nutrients that your body requires and help to keep your body strong and healthy. Eating a well balanced diet helps to keep your bones and muscles in good working order. Having strong bones and muscles is very important in helping to prevent falls.

Calcium and Vitamin D are important for healthy bones.

### Can exercise help to reduce my risk?

Keeping active is an important part of reducing your risk of falls.

By keeping active you can improve bone density, muscle strength, balance and the confidence to carry out your daily activities. The level of physical activity will depend on your general health and level of mobility. You may be referred to a physiotherapist or exercise group for advice on suitable exercises.

#### Do:

- check with your doctor or nurse:
  - before starting any new physical activity
  - if you have not exercised for some time
  - have had falls
  - have a long term medical condition.

They may refer you to a strength and balance exercise class, if appropriate.

- slowly build up the amount of activity you do during the day
- warm up before and cool down after your exercises
- wear suitable footwear and comfortable clothing

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- contact your local council's sports development department if you would like more information on exercise classes in your area.

### Do not:

- exercise if you are ill, tired or have just eaten
- overdo it or exercise if it hurts – you may experience some stiffness at first but this will ease off
- do any sudden or jerky movements, especially tipping your head back or turning your head suddenly.

### What should I do if I have a fall?

Knowing what to do could make all the difference.

- First make sure you are not hurt.
- If you are hurt or unable to get up:
  - get help by using your pendant alarm if you have one, calling out, crawling to a telephone (keep it at low level) or banging on a wall
  - keep warm, check if there is a cover nearby. It does not need to be a blanket, it could be a coat or a towel
  - move to a softer surface, carpet will be more comfortable and warmer than harder floors
  - keep moving, tighten and release the muscles in any uninjured parts of your body to help keep your circulation going while you wait for help to arrive.
- Always tell your doctor or nurse you have had a fall, even if you are not injured, as there may be something that can be done to prevent you falling again.
- If you are not hurt and feel you can get up:
  - roll over on to your hands and knees
  - crawl to a stable piece of furniture such as a chair or bed
  - hold on to the furniture and put one foot flat on the floor bending your knee in front of your stomach
  - lean forward and push on your hands and feet bringing your back foot to be next to the other foot
  - turn and sit on the chair or bed and rest for a while

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## What should I do if somebody else has a fall?

### You should:

- stay calm.
- check to see if they are seriously hurt
- keep them warm and summon help
- if you think they are injured, do not move them or give them anything to eat or drink until they have been examined.

## What will happen if I have a fall while I am in hospital?

If you are admitted to hospital the staff will complete a falls assessment. If you are found to be at risk, actions will be agreed with you to help reduce the risk of falling during your stay.

While you are in hospital there are a number of things **you** can do to reduce your risk of having a fall.

**You must always follow the advice provided by staff – your condition may have changed the way you walk.**

### You should:

- bring the walking aids you normally use into hospital with you or ask a family member or friend to bring them in for you
- ask for help if you have been advised to do
- use the nurse call system
- use any walking aid provided for you
- wear well fitting non-slip shoes or slippers
- avoid wearing long trailing clothing.

If you have been started on new medication in hospital, or your illness has made you feel dizzy it is advisable to get up slowly from your bed or chair and call for help if you need it.

## Useful tips to prevent you from falling and keep you safe:

### Do:

- keep your bedside area free from clutter
- keep your nurse call buzzer and any useful items where you can easily reach them
- use the bedside night light provided to make sure you can see at night
- avoid bending or overstretching
- make sure you wear your glasses and hearing aid, if needed and they are clean and in good working order
- ask for a hearing aid battery if needed, they are available on request
- try to eat a healthy balanced diet even if your appetite is reduced

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- ask the staff if you need any help going to the toilet or bathroom.

### Can my family and friends help me while I am in hospital?

Family and friends should:

- report any spills, obstacles or hazards to staff
- return all chairs which you have moved or used when visiting, before leaving
- return the patient bedside table and make sure their nurse call buzzer is within reach
- take any items home which are not needed e.g. suitcases
- ask staff to replace any bed rails or readjust the bed height if you have asked them to be altered during your visit.

### Contact numbers

If you have any worries or concerns you should contact:

#### North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust

Single Point of Access (SPA)

Room 417

4<sup>th</sup> Floor

University of Hartlepool

Holdforth Road

Hartlepool

Cleveland

TS24 9AH

telephone: 01429 522500

Monday – Friday, 9.00am – 5.00pm

### Further information is available from:

#### NHS Choices

telephone: 111 (when it is less urgent than 999)

Calls to this number are free from landlines and mobile phones

or via the website at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

#### Department of Health

Customer Service Centre

Richmond House

79 Whitehall

London

SW1A 2NS

telephone: 0207 210 4850

or via website at [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)

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### **National Osteoporosis Society**

Camerton  
Bath  
BA2 0PJ  
National helpline: 0808 800 003  
Monday – Friday, 9.00am – 5.00pm

### **Stockton Council**

Municipal Buildings  
Church Road  
Stockton on Tees  
TS18 1LD  
telephone: 01642 393939  
or via website at: [www.stockton.gov.uk](http://www.stockton.gov.uk)  
Monday – Friday, 8.00am – 5.30pm

### **Telecare**

The Square  
Stockton on Tees  
TS18 1TE  
telephone: 01642 634768  
or email [telecare.services@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:telecare.services@stockton.gov.uk)

### **Hartlepool Borough Council**

Customer Services  
Civic Centre  
Victoria Road  
Hartlepool  
TS24 8AY  
telephone: 01429 266522  
or email [customer.service@hartlepool.gov.uk22](mailto:customer.service@hartlepool.gov.uk22)

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This leaflet has been produced in partnership with patients and carers. All patient leaflets are regularly reviewed, and any suggestions you have as to how it may be improved are extremely valuable. Please write to the Quality Assurance Team, University Hospital of North Tees or email: [patientinformation@nth.nhs.uk](mailto:patientinformation@nth.nhs.uk)

## Comments, Concerns, Compliments or Complaints

We are continually trying to improve the services we provide.

We want to know what we're doing well or if there's anything which we can improve, that's why the Patient Experience Team is here to help.

Our Patient Experience Team is here to try to resolve your concerns as quickly as possible. If you would like to contact or request a copy of our PET leaflet, please contact:

telephone: 01642 624719

Monday – Friday, 9.00 am – 4.00 pm

Messages can be left on the answering machine and will be picked up throughout the day.

freephone: 0800 092 0084

Mobile: (can use text): 0779 506 1883

Email: [patientexperience@nth.nhs.uk](mailto:patientexperience@nth.nhs.uk)

Out of hours if you wish to speak to a senior member of Trust staff, please contact the hospital switchboard who will bleep the appropriate person.

telephone: 01642 617617

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

The Patient Experience Team is available to discuss your concerns in person Monday – Friday, 1.30 pm – 4.30 pm. The office is based on the ground floor at the University Hospital of North Tees.

## Data Protection and use of patient information

The Trust has developed a Data Protection Policy in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. All of our staff respect this policy and confidentiality is adhered to at all times. If you require further information please contact the Information Governance Team.

telephone: 01642 833551 or email: [information.governance@nth.nhs.uk](mailto:information.governance@nth.nhs.uk)

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University Hospital of Hartlepool, Holdforth Road, Hartlepool. TS24 9AH

Telephone: 01642 617617

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