

Your Guide to Reducing the Risk of Falling at Home



Falls Prevention Information Booklet

Contents:



Falls - The Facts

As we get older, **we are all more likely to fall.**

Many things can cause falls, such as the wrong shoes or problems with blood pressure or your eyesight.

Sometimes a **fall can lead to injury**, admission to hospital, or make it more difficult for people to do their usual activities.

The older you are the more likely you are to have a fall and to be injured.

There are many simple things you can do to reduce the risk of falling.

Now that you are going home from the hospital, it is a good time to **think about the ways** you can **reduce your risk of having a fall.**

This booklet will give you some helpful **advice on how to prevent falls in the home** and **what to do if you do have a fall.**



Do you feel unsteady when walking?

As we get older, it is important to **keep active**. Exercise is good for your general health and wellbeing but also it can help **to improve your balance and strengthen your muscles**. Good balance and strong muscles can **reduce your risk of falling**.

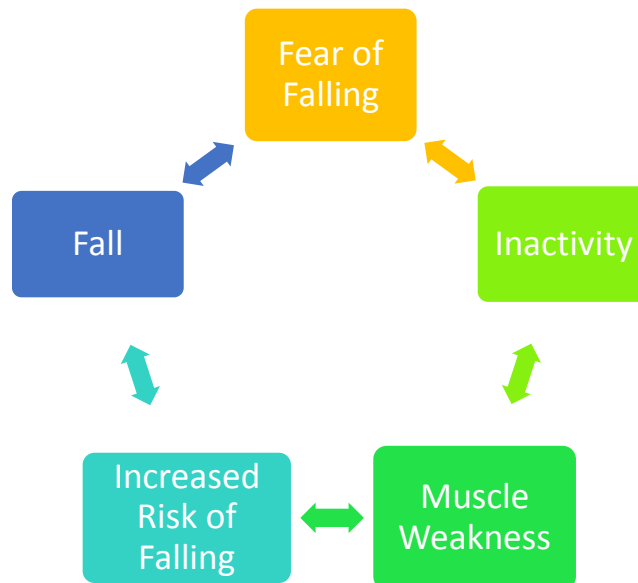
What you can do:

- ✓ If you feel unsteady or have had a fall, **talk to your Doctor** or another **healthcare professional**.
- ✓ If you have been given a **walking aid** e.g. a walking stick or frame, make sure you know how to use it correctly and **use it at all times**.
- ✓ Try to **stay as active as possible** and try to be active every day.
- ✓ Aim to get up to **30 minutes of exercise 5 days per week**. Begin slowly and start with exercises you feel comfortable doing. Start with **10-minutes of exercise if needed**. Gardening, housework, cycling and daily walks all count!
- ✓ Exercises to **strengthen your muscles** and **challenge your balance** will help to prevent falls.
- ✓ Your **physiotherapist** can tailor an exercise programme to suit your ability.
- ✓ Ask your Doctor to **refer you to your local community physiotherapist** if you feel unsteady.
- ✓ Join a **local exercise group** if you can – it will keep you strong and you might have a lot of fun!



Do you have a fear of falling?

It is common for people to **worry about falling**, especially if they have already had a fall. This can lead to people **reducing their activity** which causes **decreased muscle strength and balance** and an increased risk of falls. This process is called the falls cycle:



We suggest:

- ✓ **Talk to your doctor/health care professional** about this fear.
- ✓ **Keep active** in a way that you feel safe and comfortable.
- ✓ **Think about what you would do if you have a fall.** Having a plan will help you take control and may lessen the fear.
- ✓ Think about getting a **pendant alarm** which will reassure you that help will come if you need it.
- ✓ Have **regular contact with family and friends** so that they know you are safe and well.



Do you feel dizzy or light-headed when you stand up?

Your blood pressure can drop when you stand up causing some people to feel dizzy. This can put you at risk of falling.

What can you do?

- ✓ After lying down, **sit at the side of the bed for a few minutes** before standing.
- ✓ **Get up slowly** and make sure you feel steady before moving.
- ✓ If you feel **dizzy**, you should **report this to your doctor**. You may need to get your blood pressure checked.
- ✓ Make sure that you **eat and drink regularly**.



Do you take multiple medications?

Being on **four or more medications** has been shown to increase your risk of falling, but these medications may be necessary so **do not stop your medication without your doctor's advice to do so.**

We suggest:

- ✓ You do not take any medication without your **Doctor's/Pharmacist's advice.**
- ✓ Always **take medications as prescribed.** If new medicines or tablets cause side effects, always let your doctor know.
- ✓ Ensure you attend the GP at least once every six months and make sure your **medications are reviewed at each visit.**
- ✓ Discuss with your GP if all the medicines you take are necessary. It is helpful to gain an understanding of what each medication you take is being used for.
- ✓ You can ask for your medication to be put into **blister packs** from your pharmacy if you are having difficulty managing your medication.

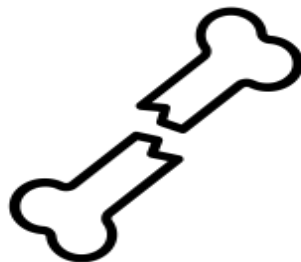


Did a fall cause you to break a bone?

This could mean your bones are not as strong as they should be and **may be due to osteoporosis**. Osteoporosis is a thinning or weakening of the bones. If your bones are weak they **may break more easily**. Having healthy bones can reduce the seriousness of any injury you might obtain from falling.

What can you do?

- ✓ Ensure you have **enough Calcium** (1000mg daily) and **Vitamin D** (800iu daily).
 - ✓ Calcium is in foods such as milk, yoghurts and cheese
 - ✓ Vitamin D can be got from oily fish and sunshine.
- ✓ **Exercise regularly**. Exercises that are good for people with osteoporosis include:
 - Weight-bearing aerobic exercise such as dancing
 - Resistance training using free weights such as dumbbells, elastic band resistance, body-weight resistance or weight-training machines
 - Exercises to improve posture, balance and body strength, such as Tai Chi.
 - Ideally, weekly physical activity should include something from all three groups.
- ✓ Talk to your Doctor about having a **bone health assessment**.
- ✓ **Keep your bones healthy** by not smoking, avoiding too much alcohol and caffeine and maintaining a healthy weight



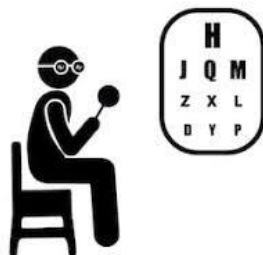
Do you have any problems with your eyes, ears or feet?

Being able to **see and listen out for hazards** or obstacles in your environment is important to reduce your risk of falling.

Foot problems like calluses, bunions, corns or untrimmed toenails can change the way you walk and **affect your balance**.

What you can do:

- ✓ Have your **eyesight and hearing checked regularly**.
- ✓ Always **turn on a light** when you go to the toilet at night or keep a night light switched on in your room.
- ✓ Make sure your **glasses are in good condition** and cleaned regularly.
- ✓ If you use a **hearing aid**, keep spare batteries nearby and always wear your aid.
- ✓ **Wear well-fitting, low-heeled, comfortable shoes** when walking or exercising. Consider shoes with Velcro or elastic shoelaces if you have difficulty tying laces. Wear supportive slippers that have a proper back on them.
- ✓ Have your feet tended to regularly by a **chiropodist** if you suffer from foot problems.



Top tips to “Fall Proof” your home

Access/ Stairs

- ✓ Install a rail by the front door to help you get up steps
- ✓ Make sure all mats are secured
- ✓ Don't rush to answer the door
- ✓ Install a second rail on the stairs to give you more support
- ✓ Make sure the stairs are well lit
- ✓ Never store items on the stairs

Bedroom

- ✓ Keep a night light and telephone by the bed
- ✓ Don't use silk sheets as you may slip. Do not use valance sheets as you may get your footing caught in them
- ✓ Consider a commode by the bed should you use the toilet frequently during the night

Lighting/ flooring

- ✓ Avoid trailing wires or cables
- ✓ Use a bed side light when getting up at night
- ✓ Avoid slippery floors and high glare

Living Areas

- ✓ Use a chair that is the right height for you with two arm rests
- ✓ Get rid of trailing wires
- ✓ If you have frayed carpets, rugs or mats- ensure they are secured

Bathroom

- ✓ Install rails by the toilet or in the bath/shower to help with transfers
- ✓ Use non-slip mats in the bath
- ✓ Use non-slip tiles
- ✓ Don't walk in the dark- keep a landing light on if you are getting up in the middle of the night for the toilet

Kitchen

- ✓ Clean up spills straight away
- ✓ Rearrange your kitchen so frequently used items are within reach



What should you do if you have a fall?

It is helpful to think about **what you would do if you were to fall** at home. This will help you be **more prepared** and may help you to remain calm.

If you fall at home or out and about, we suggest:

- ✓ **Remain calm.** You may feel shocked or frightened. Try to catch your breath and make a plan. **Check your body.** If you are injured, you are better to stay where you are and call for help.
- ✓ It is important to **get help as quickly as possible** after you fall.
- ✓ **Call for help** if there is somebody in the house with you. If you have a **pendant alarm** you should use it.
- ✓ If you **feel pain**, try and stay still and **wait for help**.
- ✓ If you are **able to get up, do so slowly and gently**. There is some advice on the next page of this booklet to show you how to get up from the floor.
- ✓ If you cannot get up try to keep warm until help arrives, **reach for a blanket** or clothes within easy reach.
- ✓ Try to **change your position regularly** to avoid too much pressure on one area of your skin.
- ✓ Always **let someone know** that you have fallen.
- ✓ **Always let your Doctor know** if you have had a fall, even if you did not injure yourself so they can find out why you have fallen.



How to get back up after a fall

If you are **not badly injured**, you could try getting up yourself – we suggest the following steps:

1. Look around for a **sturdy piece of furniture** – preferably a chair.
2. **Roll onto your side** and push yourself up onto your knees.
3. Crawl or drag yourself **towards the supportive chair**.
4. Place one hand onto the seat of the chair; place your second hand onto the seat so that you are **kneeling**.
5. **Lift the strongest leg up** so that your foot is flat on the ground.
6. **Push yourself** up into a **standing** position using both hands to push up from the armrests.
7. **Turn yourself around to sit down** on the chair. Rest before trying to move again.



To do checklist to prevent falling.

We Suggest:

	✓ Keep active and do some exercise every day.	
	✓ Eat well to remain healthy and keep bones strong.	
	✓ Keep hydrated.	
	✓ Have your eyesight and hearing checked regularly.	
	✓ Have your medicines and tablets checked every 12 months.	
	✓ Take care of your feet. Wear well-fitting shoes and slippers.	
	✓ Seek advice about incontinence.	
	✓ Ensure your home is safe by removing tripping hazards.	
	✓ Ask a medical professional why your falls are happening. ✓ If you have a loss of consciousness or black out- Speak to your doctor.	
	✓ Maintain your social contacts and take time for friends.	
	✓ Are you worried about falling? Find somebody to talk to like your GP, Public Health Nurse or a Physiotherapist/ Occupational Therapist.	

Useful links:

- The Alzheimer Society of Ireland: Call 1800 341341 or visit www.alzheimer.ie
- Age Action: Call 01 475 6989 or visit www.ageaction.ie
- Local Health Centres: www.hse.ie
- Age and Opportunity: Call 01 8057709 or visit www.ageandopportunity.ie
- Association of Occupational Therapists (AOTI) www.aoti.ie
- Falls and Syncope Unit <http://cesa.ie/clinical-services/falls-syncope-unit/>
- ALONE: Call 0818222024 or visit www.alone.ie
- Irish Osteoporosis Society: Call 1890 252751 or visit www.irishosteoporosis.ie
- Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists (ISCP) or visit www.iscp.ie
- National Council for the Blind: Call 01 8307033 or visit www.ncbi.ie
- The Carers Association: Call 1800 240724 or visit www.carersireland.com
- Pendant alarms: Emergency Response Call 1850232324 – private purchase or rental option or <https://familycarers.ie/help-and-advice/personal-alarms/>

Appendix- Checklist Tool

FLOORS	Circle when applicable	
1. Are the walkways free of cords and other clutter?	Yes	No
2. Are the floor coverings in good condition?	Yes	No
3. Are the floor surfaces non-slip?	Yes	No
4. Are loose mats securely fixed to the floor?	Yes	No
FURNITURE		
5. Can you get in and out of bed easily and safely?	Yes	No
6. Can you get up from the lounge chair easily and safely?	Yes	No
LIGHTING		
7. Are all the lights bright enough for you to see clearly?	Yes	No
8. Can you switch a light on easily from your bed?	Yes	No
9. Are the outside paths, steps and entrances well-lit at night?	Yes	No
BATHROOM		
10. Can you get on and off the toilet easily and safely?	Yes	No
11. Can you get in and out of the bath easily and safely?	Yes	No
12. Can you get in and out of the shower easily and safely?	Yes	No
13. Are there grab rail/s in the shower or beside the bath?	Yes	No
14. Are slip resistant mats used in the bath/ bathroom/ shower?	Yes	No
15. Is the toilet in close proximity to the bedroom?	Yes	No

STORAGE		Circle when applicable	
16.	Can you reach items in the kitchen that are used regularly without climbing, bending or upsetting your balance?	Yes	No
17.	Can you carry meals easily and safely from the kitchen to the dining area?	Yes	No
STAIRWAYS/STEPS			
18.	Do the <u>indoor</u> steps/stairs have a rail/ support extending along the full length of the steps/stairs?	Yes	No
19.	Do the <u>outdoor</u> steps have a grab rail extending along the full length of the steps/stairs?	Yes	No
20.	Are the edges of the steps/stairs easily identified?	Yes	No
21.	Can you use the entrance door/s safely and easily?	Yes	No
MOBILITY			
22.	Are the paths around the house in good repair, and free of clutter?	Yes	No
23.	Do you wear well-fitting slippers and shoes?	Yes	No
24.	Do you use your mobility aid as prescribed by the physiotherapist?	Yes	No

Adapted from: the HOMEFAST tool. Mackenzie, L., Byles, J. and Higginbotham, N., 2000. Designing the home falls and accidents screening tool (HOME FAST): selecting the items. British Journal of Occupational Therapy, 63(6), pp.260-269.



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