Falls Prevention

Advice Booklet

Working together to prevent falls
Contact

For further information or advice please contact:-

Falls Prevention Service

tel: (028) 9263 3705

email: FallsPrevention.Service@setrust.hscni.net
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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.
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.
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. ½ 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.
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.
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
The Home Safety Check Scheme is a free service provided by the Eastern group Environmental Health Committee 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.

Charlene.Magill@lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk
or
Charlene.Piggott@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

(028) 9049 4570

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.
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.

**Bladder problems**

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.

**Have your eyesight checked regularly**
Problems with your feet can have a significant effect on your balance and mobility.

**Advice when buying new shoes:-**

- Buy in the afternoon
- Measure both feet
- Stand up to fit
- Wear in slowly
- Never wear new shoes all day.

It is best to avoid slippers and shoes which are loose and worn or are without back support, high heels and walking with just socks or tights on as this could cause you to slip.

You can get further advice on slippers, shoes or problems with your feet from your podiatrist.
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.
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.

Pendants can be purchased from many different providers.

AgeNI 08008 100 4545
www.ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland
Fold Telecare (028) 9042 1010

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

This Trust service is offered to adults aged 65 years and over who live in the community within the boundaries of South Eastern HSC Trust.

If you or a friend/relative have had a fall in the last year, have a fear of falling or think you are at risk of falling you can self refer to the service using this form.

A Falls Assessor will arrange to come to your home and assess your risk factors for falling, provide advice and may offer to refer you to other services if needed.

Name: ..............................................................................................................
Date of Birth (dd/mm/year): ........../........../..........
Address: ...........................................................................................................
...........................................................................................................
Post Code: ......................................................................................................
HCN (if known): ............................................................................................
GP: ..............................................................................................................
GP Address: ...................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................
Telephone: ....................................................................................................
Date form completed: ....................................................................................

If you are making a referral on behalf of someone else please tick the box to confirm they have agreed to the referral [   ]

Please send referral to:-
Trust Falls Coordinator
First Floor
Old Psychiatry Buidling
Lagan Valley Hospital
Hillsborough Road
Lisburn, BT28 1JP
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.