

# Staying Steady

*Advice and information on how  
to prevent slips, trips and falls*



## **What can you can do**

General health and well being can make a big difference to your quality of life, whatever your age. Eating well, keeping fit, looking after your bones and your feet are all important. They can help you stay mobile and independent.

Clearly we can't change our biological age, but by understanding what puts us at risk, we can take preventative action.

If you've fallen before, you're at risk of a further fall, so it's even more vital to take the steps outlined in this booklet. Tips on how to prevent a fall in the home can also be found in our Staying Steady in the Home leaflet.

## **Strength and balance**

Regular physical activity such as walking, gardening, housework, dancing, keep-fit classes or chair-based exercises will improve your strength and balance.

Remember, if you are new to physical activity, speak to your GP first and take it gently at first and build up slowly. Always start with a warm-up and finish by cooling down.

## **Bone health**

Bones naturally become more brittle as we age, which makes a fracture more likely if we do fall. This is true for both men and women, but is especially true in post-menopausal women.

Don't give up on exercise just because you have had a fall or are afraid of falling. Reducing your physical activity can actually make you more prone to falling.

Ensure that you keep your bones strong by eating a balanced diet and drinking 6-8 glasses of fluid a day. All drinks count, but water, milk and fruit juices are the healthiest.

Here are some suggestions as to how you can help maintain your bone health:

- Short periods of sun exposure without sunscreen between April – October. How long you spend in the sun unprotected depends on your skin type, the time of year and what time of day it is.
- Balanced and varied food choices including two to three portions of milk and dairy foods a day
- Everyone in the general population aged 4 years and older should take a daily 10 microgram vitamin D supplement. Speak to your GP or pharmacist for more information.

## **Medicines**

Never stop taking any prescribed medication suddenly. If you suspect one or more of your medications are making you dizzy or faint, see your GP. If you are taking long-term medication, your GP should review your medicines at least once a year to make sure they are still right for you. It's particularly important that your medicines are reviewed if you're taking four or more medicines a day.

Your GP may recommend alternative medication or lower doses if they feel the side effects increase your chances of having a fall. In some cases, it may be possible for the medication to be stopped.

See your GP or practice nurse if you haven't had your medicines reviewed for more than a year, or if you're concerned that the medications you or a relative are taking may increase the risk of falling; such as medicines for blood pressure or those that are sedating such as sleeping tablets.

## **Eyesight**

It's really important to have regular eye checks, at least every two years. An Optician can detect problems in your general health through your eyes before you even notice any symptoms. Loss of vision is not a natural part of ageing and 50%\* of all sight loss is avoidable. Your eyesight plays an important role in your sense of balance too.

If you have diabetes or glaucoma you should have your eyes checked every year. You are entitled to a free NHS sight test if you are over 60 years of age, claim certain benefits or eligible for other reasons. You may also be able to get help with the cost of glasses. Ask your optician for advice. Eye tests are also available at home if necessary. Contact your local optician for more information.

## **Foot care**

Looking after your feet and having your feet checked is very important. Foot problems can have a major impact on mobility, balance and stability. If you are in any doubt see your GP for advice.

\* **Ref:** Access, Economics 2009. Future Sight Loss UK: The economic impact of partial sight and blindness in the UK population. UK RNIB.

Avoid wearing loose-fitting or open-backed footwear. Wear flat shoes with a fastening and a broad heel. Make sure they are comfortable and grip i.e. not slip-ons and not leather soles.

Try to avoid walking in socks or tights on slippery floors. If you have foot problems / discomfort that affects your walking and balance you may benefit from a specialist assessment. You will need a referral from a health professional such as your GP.

## **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.

## **Keep safe at home**

Small changes in your home can help prevent falls

- Try to avoid having loose rugs and mats
- Good lighting is very important, particularly on the stairs
- Keep the floor clear of trailing cables, fraying carpet edges and clutter
- Be careful your pets do not get under your feet
- Consider getting a cordless phone or an answering machine, so that you don't have to rush to answer the phone
- Always mop up spills immediately.

## **Telecare**

Telecare offers extra support to keep you safe and independent in your home. This can be from a number of sensors installed around the home to monitor for example, falls. To find out more about Telecare contact telecare at: [wakefield.gov.uk](http://wakefield.gov.uk) or Social Care Direct on tel: 0345 8 503 503.

## **Care Link**

Care Link services provides reassurance, peace of mind and a response to emergency situations 24 hours a day every day. If you are worried about falling when you are alone at home you could think about getting a community alarm with a pendant.

To find out more contact Care Link services on tel: 01977 788000 or email : [carelink@wdh.co.uk](mailto:carelink@wdh.co.uk)

## **What to do if you have a fall/Getting up after a fall**

Don't get up straight away, give yourself time to collect yourself and get your breath back.

### **Your family/carer should not try to lift you up.**

If you're not hurt and feel well enough, you should try to get up from the floor as safely as possible. The best way to get up off the floor will differ from person to person, but as a guide, you should:

1. roll onto your side then slowly pull yourself up so that you're on your hands and knees
2. crawl towards a sturdy object that can support you to get up — such as a solid chair or the stairs
3. using the object, and supporting your weight with your hands, slide one foot forward so that it's flat on the floor. Your other knee should remain on the floor
4. pushing up from your arms and legs, slowly rise to your feet or to a sitting position
5. sit for a few minutes before you try to do anything else

**If you are unable to get up or it causes pain stop!**





Roll onto your side.



Crawl over to a chair or sturdy furniture.



From a kneeling position, put your arms up onto the seat of the chair.



Bring one knee forward.  
Place that foot on the floor.



Push up with your arms and legs. Pivot your bottom around.



Sit down. Rest before trying to move.

### **If you have hurt yourself:**

Get help if you can. Try to attract attention or use your personal alarm or pendent (if you have one) or calling 999 if you can reach a phone.

Move to a soft surface and try to keep warm, reach for something to use as a blanket to cover you.

Notify your GP practice if you have a fall or start feeling unsteady, even if you feel all right otherwise. If you are concerned about your falling, ask for a falls risk assessment.

## Planning Ahead

It makes sense to prepare yourself and your home in case the worst happens. Then you can get on with enjoying life, knowing that you've done the groundwork.

- Place cushions and blankets around the house at floor level so that, if you do fall, you can keep warm and comfortable while waiting for help.
- Use your common sense on placement: they need to be easily accessible but should be stored so they don't cause a hazard in themselves!
- Put a bottle of water with the cushions so that you can stay hydrated while waiting.
- If you have a cordless phone, carry it in your pocket.
- Get a mobile phone if you don't already have one and keep it (switched on) in your pocket or on a belt. Programme in the phone numbers of neighbours or friends/relatives nearby who could help if you fall.
- Consider getting a community alarm. You wear it like a pendant, on your wrist, and when you press a button the control centre will telephone your nominated key holder(s) so they check on you.

**NOTES:**

## Useful contacts

Live Well Wakefield	01924 255363
Age UK Wakefield District	01977 552114
Social Care Direct	0345 8 503 503
Care Link	01977 788000
Carers Wakefield District	01924 305544

## Produced in partnership with:

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We are committed to providing high quality care. If you have a suggestion, comment, complaint or appreciation about the care you have received, or if you need this leaflet in another format please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on: **01924 542972** or email: **myh-tr.palsmidyorks@nhs.net**

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