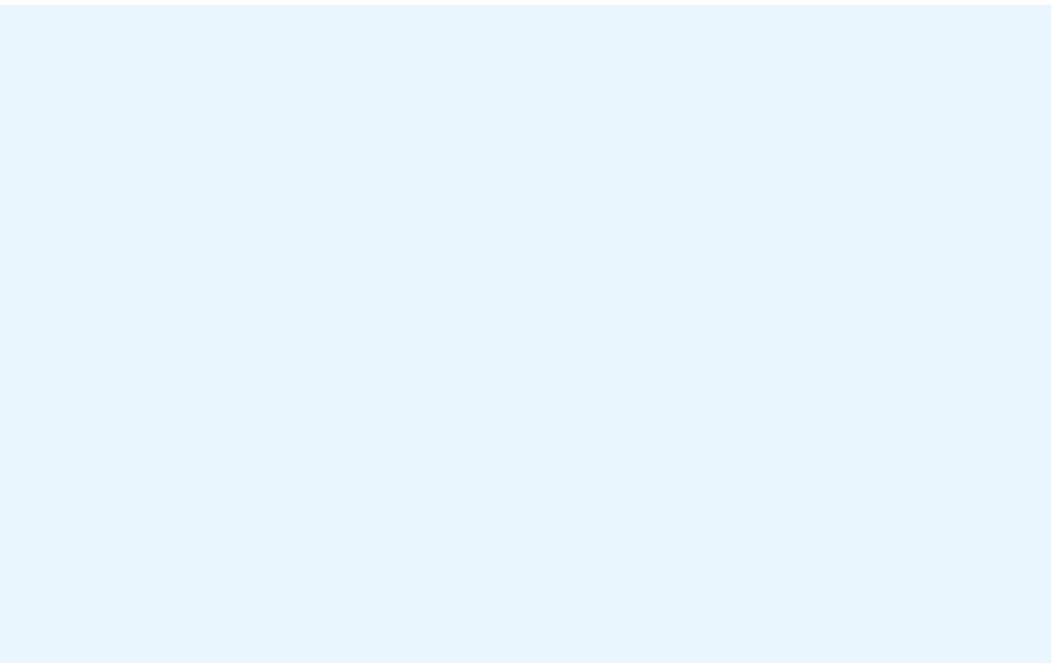




# How to reduce your risk of falling



# Contents

## What this guide is about

Worried about falling?	5
How to get help from the NHS	6

## Staying active

Moving more	8
Improving your strength and balance	10
Getting started and keeping it up	12
Staying active in a care home	13

## Your health

Eyesight, hearing and balance	14
Managing your medicines	18
Taking care of your feet	19
Keeping your bones strong	20

## Around the home

Asking for a care needs assessment	24
Checking your home environment	25
Keeping safe at home	26
Getting a home safety check	28
Telecare	29

<b>Steps to staying steady</b>	<b>30</b>
--------------------------------	-----------

<b>What to do if you have a fall</b>	<b>32</b>
--------------------------------------	-----------

<b>Useful organisations</b>	<b>33</b>
-----------------------------	-----------

# What this guide is about

**As we get older, lots of us may start to feel a bit unsteady on our feet and become worried about falling. But there are simple things you can do to help yourself feel more confident and avoid a slip or fall.**

Having a fall can leave you feeling quite shaken up – and even the thought of falling can affect your confidence. However, while falls can become more of a concern as we get older, they aren't inevitable. There's a lot you can do to reduce your chance of having a fall, even if you've had one in the past.

This guide explains ways you can reduce your risk of falling by looking after your health and checking your home is safe. There are things that can help you stay independent for longer and make day-to-day life that bit easier.

## Worried about falling?

You might be nervous because you've had a fall before or because you've noticed you're starting to feel unsteady on your feet. You might have noticed changes to your health, or just feel like you're slowing down a little.

Whatever the reason, it isn't unusual to become cautious and lose confidence, and this can stop you doing the things you used to do and make you feel more isolated.

If you're feeling like this, you might be reluctant to ask for help. It can be difficult to admit that the things you used to be able to do aLang (e7.-6.7 (k)22.a8 (o6uc)1g)6.4 ETEMC /P Łang (en-GB)/MCID



## How to get help from the NHS

If you've had a fall or you're feeling unsteady, tell a healthcare professional, such as your doctor – even if you feel fine otherwise. There are many reasons why you might be feeling unsteady, and there are ways to help you feel more confident.

Your doctor can check your balance and the way you walk to see if improvements can be made. They may refer you for a falls risk assessment or to a falls prevention service. These services are run by healthcare professionals with specialist training to help people improve and maintain their strength and balance.

### **The purpose of a falls risk assessment is to:**

- listen to what you think the problem could be
- try to work out what's making you feel unsteady
- agree on an action plan to reduce your risk of falling.

Following your assessment, you should have an action plan in place that's designed to meet your individual needs. This should be regularly reviewed so healthcare professionals can see how you're getting on. It might include:

- strength and balance exercises
- a home safety check
- checks of your eyesight and the medicines you take
- explanation of how to get up safely if you fall
- explanation of how to get help if you need it
- investigation of any continence problems











# Getting started and keeping it up

Lots of us have spent our lives on the move – running around after children, holding down busy jobs, and keeping up with friends and hobbies. And while it can be nice to enjoy a slower pace of life as we get older, there's no reason we have to just because of our age.

Making regular activity a part of your routine is one of the best ways to stay well as you get older – and it can also be an opportunity to socialise and meet new people. And if you start a regular activity with someone else, whether that's a regular walk or a weekly exercise class, you can help motivate each other to stick with it.

Sometimes it can seem like a lot of effort to start doing more, so a good way to get started is to try different activities and find something that you enjoy and works for you. Keep your goals simple and realistic. Once you know what kind of activity is right for you, start gently and build up gradually. Aim to do a little bit more each time, if you can.

It's easier to keep up an activity you enjoy – and that's when you'll improve and begin to feel the benefits. As you become stronger and more flexible and your balance improves, daily tasks should become that bit easier.

## Good to know

If you experience chest pain or feel faint during an activity, stop immediately and contact your doctor.

## Staying active in a care home

If you live in a care home, it's important to try and keep moving. Walking, for example, is an easy way to stay active and it's low



- If you care for someone who might be unable to recognise or communicate that they have a sight problem – for example, someone living with dementia – arrange regular eye tests for them. You can ask the optician to adapt the tests to

## Hearing problems

Our ears are essential in maintaining balance, so it's important we look after them. The risk of hearing loss increases as we get older, but people often wait several years after noticing their hearing is getting worse before raising it with their doctor.

- Talk to your doctor as soon as you notice your hearing isn't what it used to be, as a problem with your ears can affect your balance. If there's no medical reason for the change in your hearing (such as a build-up of wax or an ear infection), you can be referred for a hearing test and prescribed an NHS digital hearing aid in one or both ears, if necessary.
- If you care for someone who's been prescribed a hearing aid, make sure they wear it and check the batteries frequently.
- Contact RNID for more information (page 35). You can try the free hearing check on their website or call their information



## Combined sight and hearing problems

Sight and hearing problems can appear gradually as we get older, so it can sometimes be hard to notice them.

These types of problem are often thought of as natural things to expect as we get older. But they can have a huge impact on day-to-day life – so it's important to seek help if they're affecting you.

Your local council's sensory team can offer help and support. Following an assessment, their specialist staff will explain what help is available to you. They may also offer mobility training as well as advice on moving around when you're at home or out and about – plus guidance on how you can stay as fit and active as possible.

## Next steps

# Managing your medicines

Low blood pressure and poorly controlled diabetes can make you feel faint or dizzy – as can certain medicines or being on a lot of medication. If you ever feel like this, let your doctor or pharmacist know – they may need to check the dosage you're on or consider alternative medicines.

If you take medication, it should be reviewed regularly in case you no longer need it or the dose needs to be changed.

If you have any concerns about your medicines, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

## Good to know

Alcohol can increase your risk of falling in and of itself – but it's

# Taking care of your feet

Problems with your feet and footwear can stop you getting out and about. They can also affect your balance and increase your risk of falling – so it's important to look after your feet and make sure you're wearing appropriate footwear.

These tips can help you feel steadier:

- Report problems such as foot pain or decreased sensation in your feet to your doctor or practice nurse.
- Keep your toenails short. If you're finding it difficult to cut them yourself, try asking a friend or family member for help. Or you can ask your local Age UK whether it offers a toenail-cutting service. In Wales, contact your local Age Cymru. There may be a charge for these services.
- Always wear shoes, sandals or slippers. To avoid slips, don't walk indoors in bare feet, socks or tights.
- Wear shoes or sandals that fit well. High-sided shoes with low heels, thin soles and good grip are normally a safer choice.
- Avoid wearing high heels.
-

# Keeping your bones strong

Stronger bones don't just make a fall less likely, they reduce the risk of more severe effects if you do fall. Regular exercise that keeps you on your feet, such as walking, bowls and tennis, helps keep bones strong.



## Calcium and vitamin D

You need calcium and vitamin D to maintain strong bones – both of which can be found in certain foods.

Dairy foods, fortified soya products and canned fish (including the bones) are all good sources of calcium. Calcium is also found in fortified breakfast cereals, white bread, pulses and nuts (such as almonds).

Salmon, sardines and other oily fish, eggs and fortified spreads are all good sources of vitamin D – however, it's difficult to get enough vitamin D from diet alone. Sunshine is the best source of vitamin D. Try to get outside for short periods each day from March to October, exposing at least your forearms and hands to the sun – but be careful not to let your skin redden or burn.

In autumn and winter, the sun isn't strong enough to produce vitamin D and most people won't get enough from food – so adults of all ages should consider taking a daily vitamin D supplement of ten micrograms (10µg).

You might need a vitamin D supplement all year round if you spend most of the day indoors, have darker skin, or cover your skin for cultural or health reasons. If you think you aren't getting enough vitamin D, ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.

## Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis causes bones to become more fragile. This means minor bumps or falls can result in a broken bone.

Your risk of osteoporosis is increased by:

- your age – the older you are the more likely you are to develop it
- a history of osteoporosis in your family
- a low body weight
- heavy drinking, smoking and a lack of exercise
- some medications including long-term steroids, anti-epileptic drugs and some chemotherapy treatments
- an early menopause or hysterectomy with removal of the ovaries if you're female
- low levels of testosterone following surgery for some types of cancer if you're male

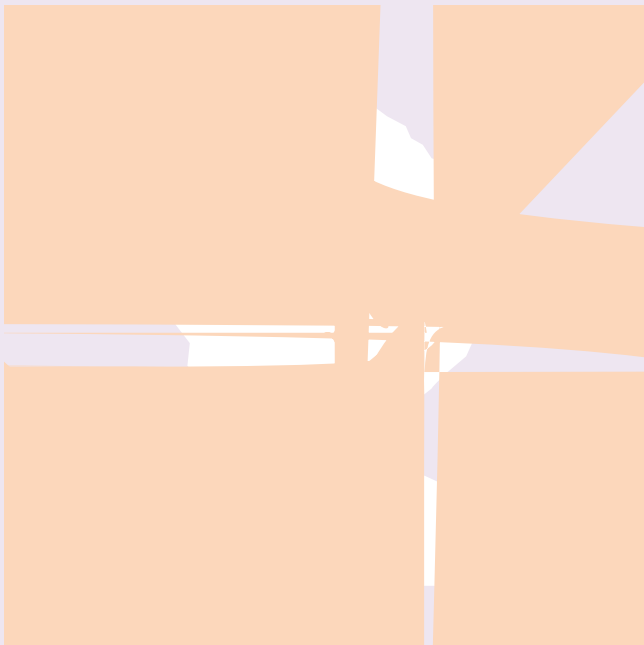
If you're concerned about osteoporosis, contact the Royal Osteoporosis Society (page 35) or use their online osteoporosis risk checker at [ros.org.uk/risk-checker](https://www.ros.org.uk/risk-checker). Speak to your doctor if you think you could be at risk of osteoporosis – this may be more likely if either of your parents broke a hip.

## Mary is 82 years old and lives in sheltered accommodation.

**Joining a seated exercise programme has improved Mary's fitness and balance.**

'My balance was never any good, but it's got worse as I've got older. I recently had a bad fall in my flat. I tripped over the rug and gashed my head on the fireplace. I needed stitches and looked a real picture with two black eyes. It really knocked me for six, and I became wary about going out and doing jobs around the house.

'Then Alison, the warden, asked me if I wanted to join the weekly seated exercise programme run by our local Age UK in the communal lounge. I knew about it but thought that I was too old for exercising – and I like to keep myself to myself anyway. But Alison persuaded me.



'The first session was quite tiring, but I began to feel better as we went along. My strength, balance and fitness have all improved – and I'm less worried about falling over.

'It's really good fun, too – definitely not what I expected. Everyone has a good natter and a cup of tea afterwards. It's

# Around the home

Sometimes even familiar environments can become difficult to navigate as we get older. But there are some simple things you can do to feel safer and more comfortable at home.

## Asking for a care needs assessment

If you think you could benefit from adaptations to your home, get in touch with the adult social services department of your local council, or with the integrated care team in your local



# Checking your home environment

To help make your home safer, keep an eye out for things that could make you slip, trip or fall. While some things might seem obvious, it's surprising how often they're overlooked – so it's worth thinking about these questions:

- Is there a night light, a bedside light or a torch by the bed in case you need to get up in the night?
- Is there good lighting elsewhere in your home – particularly on the stairs?
- Are things tidied out of the way of stairs, steps and hallways?
- Are there handrails on both sides of the stairs?
- Are floors clear of trailing wires, wrinkled or fraying rugs and carpets, or anything else you might trip or slip on?
- Is there a non-slip mat and a fitted handrail in the bath?
- Are there non-slip mats under rugs?
- Are garden paths clear and free from moss? Watch out for other uneven paths and slippery surfaces as well – handrails might be a helpful addition in some situations.
- Do you use a stepladder to reach high places? Always ask someone to help if you're using a ladder – and avoid standing on chairs.
- Does your pet wear a collar that you could put a bell on? Pets can get under your feet, so it's good to be aware of where they are when you're moving about.



## The stairs

Getting up and down the stairs can be a challenge as we get older – even new stairs can feel tiring and out of breath quite quickly. It's also a common cause of falls and falling.

But there are a few things you can do to make the stairs seem less daunting.

- Make sure your stairs are safe and free from hazards.
- Pay attention to what you're doing – there's nothing wrong with taking a break.
- Think about having a second handrail – these could make all the difference.

## Next steps

Local Age UKs operate handyman services across much of the country. These services offer extra help with small practical jobs, from putting up curtain rails or door chains to installing energy-efficient light bulbs. The cost will depend on the nature of the work required. To find out details of your local Age UK, call Age UK Advice and in Wales, contact Age Cymru Advice (page 33).



# Telecare

If you're worried about what might happen if you fall, simple technology known as 'telecare' can help put your mind at ease. For example, a bed or chair sensor can detect if you've got up but not returned within a set time – and can then automatically send an alert to a carer or call centre in case you've fallen.

## Personal alarms

Personal alarms allow you to call for help if you need it – for example, if you're unwell or if you have a fall and can't reach a telephone. By pressing a button on a pendant or wristband, you can contact a 24-hour response centre. Staff at the emergency response centre will then call either your chosen contact – a neighbour, relative or friend – or the emergency services if the situation is more urgent.

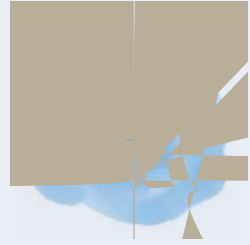
Your local council may run a telecare or personal alarm scheme. Visit [www.gov.uk/apply-for-community-alarm](http://www.gov.uk/apply-for-community-alarm) to search by

# Steps to staying steady

This handy checklist runs through 8 key things you can do to help avoid a fall.

## 1 Stay active

Focus on activities that challenge your balance and strengthen your legs and upper body, like walking, gardening or dancing (see pages 8-13)



## 2 Check your sight and hearing

Go for regular sight tests and report any hearing difficulties you have to identify any problems that may be affecting your balance (see pages 14-17).



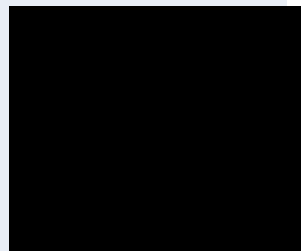
## 3 Ask about your medicines

Certain medicines can make you feel faint or affect your balance. Let your GP or pharmacist know if you ever feel like this (see page 18).



## 4 Look after your feet

Wear well-fitting shoes and slippers and tell your GP or chiropodist about any foot problems (see page 19).



### Get enough vitamin D

Vitamin D is essential for keeping your bones strong – the best source is sunshine (see page 20).





# Useful organisations

## Age UK

We provide information and advice for people in later life

## Deafblind UK

Provides services, information and advice for people who are deafblind or have sight and hearing loss.

Tel: **0800 132 320** (for voice or text calls)

Email: [info@deafblind.org.uk](mailto:info@deafblind.org.uk)

[www.deafblind.org.uk](http://www.deafblind.org.uk)

## Home Improvement Agencies

Help older homeowners and private tenants organise repairs, improvements and adaptations to their homes.

In England, contact [Foundations](#)

Tel: **0300 124 0315**

[foundations.uk.com](http://foundations.uk.com)

In Wales, contact [Care & Repair Cymru](#)

Tel: **02920 107580**

[www.careandrepair.org.uk](http://www.careandrepair.org.uk)

## NHS

Comprehensive information service to help you take control of your healthcare. The website includes an A–Z health dictionary and symptom checker.

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

In Wales, contact [NHS 111 Wales](#)

Tel: **111**

[www.111.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.111.wales.nhs.uk)

In Northern Ireland, contact [NI Direct](#)

[www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)

## NHS Low Income Scheme

Provides full or partial help with health costs for people on a low income.

Tel: **0300 330 1343**

[www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-low-income-scheme](http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-low-income-scheme)

## **NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence)**

Provides guidance on being healthy and treating illnesses in England and Wales. You can download **Falls in older people** from their website: [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg161](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg161)

## **RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People)**

Provides information and support for blindness and visual impairment.

Tel: **0303 123 9999**

[www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

In Wales, go to [www.rnib.org.uk/nations/wales](http://www.rnib.org.uk/nations/wales)

## **RNID**

Provides advice and support through an information line and range of factsheets.

Tel: **0808 808 0123**

Text: **07360 268 988**

Email: [contact@rnid.org.uk](mailto:contact@rnid.org.uk)

[www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)

## **Royal Osteoporosis Society**

Offers information and support on prevention and treatment





If you're able to, please complete the donation form below to make your gift and return to: **Freepost Age UK REPLY**. Alternatively, you can phone **0800 077 8751** or visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/donate](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/donate). If you prefer, you can donate directly to one of our national or local partners. Thank you.

**Your details**

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Title:  Forename:  Surname:

Home address:

Postcode:

Email address:

We'd like to keep in touch with you to tell you about the vital work we do for older people, our fundraising appeals and opportunities to support us, as well as the products and services you can buy.

Please tick the boxes to let us know how you'd like to hear from us:

I **would** like to receive communications by email.

We will never sell your data and we promise to keep your details safe and secure.

I **do not** wish to receive communications by post.

If you don't want to hear from us, or change your mind about how we contact you, please email [contact@ageuk.org.uk](mailto:contact@ageuk.org.uk) or call **0800 169 8787**. For further details on how your data is used and stored by the Age UK network go to [www.ageuk.org.uk/help/privacy-policy](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/help/privacy-policy).

**Your gift**

Please accept my one-off gift of: **£10**  **£15**  **£20**  My choice £

I enclose a cheque/postal order made payable to Age UK, **or**

I wish to make payment by (please tick):

MasterCard  Visa  CAF CharityCard

Card number  Expiry date



# What should I do now?

You may want to read some of our relevant information guides and factsheets, such as:

- **Getting help at home**
- **Advice for carers**
- **Healthy living**

You can order any of our guides or factsheets by giving our Advice Line a ring for free on **0800 169 65 65** (8am-7pm, 365 days a year).

Our friendly advisers are there to help answer any questions.

All of our publications are available in large print and audio formats.

There's plenty of really useful information on our website, too. Visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/wellbeing](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/wellbeing) to get started.

If contact details for your local Age UK are not in the below box, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.



0800 169 65 65  
[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)



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