

## Falls factsheet

### Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net).

### Falls are no laughing matter

#### Falls can lead to...

Injury, reduced quality of life, reduced mobility and loss of independence.

#### You are more at risk of a fall if you:

- have fallen before
- have a fear of falling
- take 4 or more medicines
- have a problem with your balance
- have difficulty getting up from a dining chair without using your arms.

#### Help and advice on prevention is available from:

- your GP, community nurse or therapist
- Care Direct  
Tel: 0845 1551 007
- NHS Choices website at [www.nhs.uk/conditions/falls/prevention](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/falls/prevention)
- Independent Living Centre  
Tel: 01392 380181  
website: [www.independentlivingcentre.org.uk](http://www.independentlivingcentre.org.uk)

#### Emergency situations:

Consider getting a personal alarm – especially if you live alone. This would enable you to get help if you fall or injured yourself. Contact Independent Living Centre for advice, including how to access one on 01392 380181.

Consider using a cordless phone around the house or getting on answering machine rather than rushing to the phone. Would it help to have a phone beside your chair?

### **If you have a fall – don't panic**

**Call for help** – try to shout, bang on the wall or crawl to the phone.

**Assess the situation** – decide if you can get up.

**If you think you can get up...**

**A** Roll onto your hands and knees.



**B** Crawl to a stable piece of furniture such as a bed or chair.



**C** Place your hands on to a firm surface for support i.e. a chair.  
Place one foot flat on the floor bending your knee in front of your tummy.



**D** Facing the chair, push yourself up to a standing position.



**D**

**E** Turn and sit on the firm surface.



**E**

**F** Rest for a while before getting up.

**If you are hurt and think you can't get up...**

Rest and wait.

- A Can you attract attention by banging your stick?



**A**

- B Can you attract attention by pressing your pendant alarm if you have one?



**B**

- C Can you get comfortable? If you can place a pillow under your head.



**C**

- D Can you keep warm? If you can cover yourself with a rug/tablecloth or whatever you have within easy reach.



**D**

- E Keep moving your joints (see pictures E and F) – if you can move away from a damp area, you need to let your bladder 'go'.



**E**



**F**

Continue to call for help.

**After any fall, report it to your GP and seek medical attention.**

## Preventing falls

This information is to help keep you safe, well and maintain your independence at home by helping you to prevent falls and accidents. Falls and accidents are more common as people get older and many older people experience them each year. Remember that making small changes may help you to avoid a fall and keep safe and independent. Always tell your GP or other health professional if you have a fall – they may be able to help you reduce your risk of having another fall.

Sometimes a fall can affect your confidence and make you afraid of falling again.

You can reduce the risk of falls, accidents and injuries by:

- Taking time to look through this factsheet which offers information to keep you safe and well
- Considering the safety suggestions.

If you need help following any of the suggestions contained in this factsheet, ask a friend or relative to help or contact Care Direct on 0345 1551 007. For equipment queries, contact the Independent Living Centre on 01392 380181.

# Are you safe at home? – how to reduce the risks in your home

## Common hazards in the home

**Floor coverings:** Replace or repair worn or loose floor coverings. Make sure mats and floors are non-slip. **Tape down edges of loose rugs or remove them.** Mop up spills straight away.

**Out of reach items:** Keep items you use most often in places that are easy to reach. If necessary you can buy reaching aids. **Ask someone to replace light bulbs.**

**Handrails:** Make sure your handrails are securely fitted. **Would it help to have a handrail fitted each side?**

**Hallways:** Consider having a cage fitted on the back of your letterbox to reduce the need for bending over when collecting letters.

**Position and height of furniture:** Ensure that furniture is arranged so that you can move around easily. Keep walkways clear of furniture. Consider removing castors from moveable furniture. A health professional can arrange for height of furniture to be checked and altered as appropriate.

**Tripping hazards:** Make sure there are no trailing flexes or clutter on the floor or stairs. Avoid clothes which are too long or ill fitting.

**Pets:** Know where your pets are and keep them from under your feet.

**Footwear:** Make sure that slippers and shoes are well fitting and in good condition. Avoid high heels and thick soled shoes.

**Lighting:** Always use your lights when light levels are low. Do not use energy saving light bulbs on stairs unless you intend to keep the light on all the time when it is dark.

**Clutter:** Keep rooms and stairs free from clutter. Take care when carrying items on the stairs.

**Fire:** Use a fire guard on open fires or gas/electric fires. Never rest clothes or place newspapers on the guard.

**Kitchen equipment:** Use a timer or alarm clock to remind you when food is cooked. Keep saucepan handles turned away from you when cooking. Keep work surfaces around the cooker tidy and have plenty of space when handling hot food or liquids. Never leave pans unattended. Turn off gas rings etc. when answering the door or telephone. Consider using a perching stool to aid balance.

**Kettle:** Unplug your kettle before filling it. Consider a cordless kettle or use a jug to fill your kettle. Only boil as much water as you need.

**Bath:** If you are not able to get out of the bath easily, would it help to get grab rails, a non-slip bath mat or bath aids? Beware of using oils – they may make the bath slippery. When filling the bath ensure you put cold water in first. Always test the water before getting in the bath or shower.

**Basin:** Sit at the basin while washing if you have difficulty standing to wash. Try a perching stool if you have room. Alternatively, consider having grab rails fitted.

**Bedroom:** Make sure the bedspread or duvet is not too long. Avoid trailing night clothes. Sit when dressing rather than standing on one leg.

**Electric blankets:** Be aware of the safety instructions for your electric blanket. The Fire Service recommend you check the wiring and plug, never fold it, keep it dry and replace it every ten years or when damaged.

**Bedroom lighting:** Have a bedside lamp with an easily reached switch, or torch by the bed. Always switch on a light before getting out of bed. Consider fitting nightlights plugged into spare sockets in the room and landing to give a constant low level of light all the time. Also consider having a phone beside your bed.

## Outside your home

**Drive and path:** Look out for uneven ground or broken pavements. If it's icy, wet or windy, stay indoors and don't be tempted to go out. Are paths and entrances well lit? Do external steps have handrails? The Independent Living Centre can offer help and advice on what steps to take to get them installed.

**Garden:** Do not leave tools lying around. Wind up the garden hose. Always use a circuit breaker when using power tools or mowing the lawn. Consider having flower beds raised.

## General safety suggestions

**Gas and electrical appliances:** Make sure your boiler, gas and electrical appliances are serviced regularly. If you are over 60 you can have certain gas and electric appliances inspected free once a year. For further information contact your supplier.

**Smoke alarms:** Fit smoke alarms on all levels and make sure you test them regularly. Consider contacting the Fire Service for a free home fire safety check and advice on smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. Contact Devon and Somerset Fire & Rescue Service on 0800 0502 999.

**Electric sockets:** Do not overload electric sockets. If plugs look brown or wires are frayed stop using them and get them repaired or replaced immediately. If in doubt, seek professional advice.

**Keeping warm:** Make sure you keep warm in winter. Several layers of light clothing is better than one heavy garment. Where possible, wear head covering.

**Winter hazards:** Keep food cupboards well stocked in case there is snow or ice on paths, steps and pavements if you don't want to go out. Make sure that any alternative heating device you keep for emergencies when your usual heating is lost, has been safety checked annually.

## Keeping well and safe at home

### Your general health

#### Have you had an eyesight test in the past year?

Ask your optician for regular eye tests – at least every two years or if you notice any change in your sight. Eyesight checks are free to the over 60's.

Separate glasses can be safer than bifocals or varifocals. Always remember to keep your glasses clean – make cleaning glasses a routine after meals!

#### Do your feet require attention?

Visit a chiropodist or discuss footcare with your GP. You may be entitled to free treatment.

#### Do you get up to go to the toilet frequently and need to rush?

Consider discussing this with your GP or nurse.

#### Have you considered having a flu jab?

Flu can, in the short term, make you more prone to falls and accidents.

#### Do you get enough exercise?

Keep active. Housework and walking both count. Active Devon's web pages ([www.activedevon.org](http://www.activedevon.org)) provide signposting for activities near you. Alternatively, contact [onesmallstep.org.uk](http://onesmallstep.org.uk) to help take a first step to a healthier you. Their number is 0800 2982 654 or 01392 908139. To find out about other ways to keep active, contact Care Direct on 0345 1551 007.

#### Do you have a family history of osteoporosis (brittle bones)?

Bones get thinner with age, so include lots of calcium and vitamin D in your diet. Drink milk and eat dairy products, meat, fish, poultry, fruit and vegetables. Daylight is a source of vitamin D, so get out when you can. If you are concerned please contact your GP.

### Mobility

#### Have you fallen in the past six months?

If the cause was a hazard in the home, has it been removed or repaired?

#### Do you have weak muscles, balance problems or stiff joints or have difficulty getting in or out of a chair or the bath?

Physiotherapy or occupational therapy may help. There may be simple pieces of equipment that might help you such as chair raises or a bath board. The Independent Living Centre can advice on appropriate equipment for your needs and how to access equipment. To be referred to a physiotherapist, you will need to speak with your local GP surgery.



## **Do you have difficulty walking?**

Ensure walking aids are suitable for your needs. Your physiotherapist or any specialist retail outlet may be able to advise you. Do not use other people's walking aids. Check any equipment you have for signs of wear and tear. Replace ferrules (rubber feet) as soon as they are worn.

## **Balance and dizziness**

### **Do you get dizzy or light headed?**

Pause when getting out of bed or up from a chair. Try moving your arms and legs a few times. If symptoms of dizziness are severe or come on suddenly, tell your doctor. Your blood pressure may need checking.

## **Medicines**

### **Do you take medicines?**

If you are concerned they may be causing any dizziness or other side effects, discuss with your pharmacist or family doctor. If possible visit the same pharmacy – many pharmacists place your details on computer so when you present a new prescription or buy medicines they will check for side effects and provide advice. If you are 75 or over, your medicines should be reviewed by your doctor every 12 months (or every six months if you are taking four or more medicines). If you have not had a review, ask your GP for one.

### **Do you have any out-of-date medicines?**

Medicines should not be used after the expiry date of the prescription or 'use by date'. They should not be given to anyone else. Please return out-of-date medicines to any pharmacy.

### **Do you remember when to take your tablets?**

Ask your doctor or nurse about help with remembering to take your tablets. Store medicines in a safe but accessible place.

## **Alcohol**

Remember alcohol can affect your balance. It does not mix well with some medicines. Ask your pharmacist for advice.

## **Your wellbeing**

### **Do you have trouble sleeping?**

### **Do you become confused or forgetful?**

In some cases there may be a reason that your doctor can advise upon and suggest help or treatment.

## Is your home warm enough?

It is especially important to keep the living room and bedroom warm, particularly if you have mobility problems. Make sure that you do not turn off the heating to save money. You may be eligible for a home efficiency grant. Contact Care Direct on 0345 1551 007 for advice.

### **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

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