

Falls prevention for the elderly

About falls and what you can do to help prevent them

Physiotherapy Department



Patient information leaflet

Purpose of this leaflet

- To provide information about falls
- What you can do to help prevent falls including exercises
- What to do if you have fallen
- What to do if you have any concerns or questions

Why is it important to learn more about preventing falls?

Falls and fall-related injuries are a common and serious problem for older people. People aged 65 and older have the highest risk of falling, with 30% of people older than 65 and 50% of people older than 80 falling at least once a year.

The effects of a fall can include distress, pain, injury, loss of confidence and loss of independence. There can be both physical and psychological benefits of minimising the risk of falling. Some falls are preventable so it is important to do what you can to help prevent a fall.

What can I do to help prevent falls?

It is important for you to consider the cause of the falls. There may be more than one.

Vision

- Having poor vision can increase the risk of falls. If you are concerned that your vision has deteriorated, ensure you have your sight tested.
- Surrey Association of Visual Impairment (SAVI) can provide some useful advice (see list of contacts at the end of the leaflet).

Hearing

- Poor hearing can affect balance.
- Have you had your hearing checked recently? If not, you might benefit from an up to date hearing check.
- If you wear hearing aids, ensure you wear them when walking. Ensure they are in good working order.

Feet

- Poorly fitted footwear can leave you feeling unsteady on your feet. Ensure shoes have good grip and are secure on your feet.
- If you have diabetes, do you or someone you know check the soles of your feet?
- If you have problems with your feet, have you had a recent chiropody appointment?
- Ensure to trim your toenails regularly and use moisturiser.

Medication

If you are on any kind of medication:

- Make sure you take the correct medication at the designated time.
- Have any medications changed recently which have made you feel more unsteady? If so, speak with your GP. Some medications have side effects that can increase your risk of falls.
- Being on more than 4 medications may cause an increased risk of falls. Your GP can review your medications and may recommend alternatives or lower doses to minimise the side effects that may increase risk of falls.

Environment at home

Think about your home environment. There may be changes you can make to help minimise the risk of trips and falls.

- Remove any loose rugs or carpet that you could trip on.
- Use non-slip mats and rugs, especially in your shower or bathroom.
- Mop up spillages straight away.
- Do you have enough rails to assist you on your stairs and around your toilet? You can privately purchase or hire toilet frames from the Red Cross. If you need adjustments to your home, including handrails, please speak with your GP. Your GP can refer you to Rapid Response or Social Services for home adjustments.

- Is your house well lit for you to spot potential dangers? Use high wattage light bulbs so you can see clearly.
- Organise your home to minimise climbing, stretching, bending and bumping into things. Use electrical extension leads so you don't need to bend down to plug something in.
- Don't walk on slippery floors in socks, tights or bare feet.
- Remove any clutter, trailing wires and frayed carpet.
- Get help from family, friends, or carers to do things that you are unable to do safely yourself.

Continence

- Do you suffer from incontinence or urinary urgency? You may benefit from taking more regular trips to the toilet to avoid having to rush to the toilet.
- Caffeinated drinks can increase urinary urgency. Avoiding or reducing the amount of caffeinated drinks you consume can reduce urinary urgency.

Nutrition

- Have you eaten and drunk enough fluids today? If you haven't eaten or drunk enough, it may make you feel low in energy and weak. If you don't drink enough this can also make you feel dizzy.

Medical reasons

- Do you suffer from decreased blood pressure when you stand? Make sure you don't make too many sudden movements. Ensure you rest if you feel dizzy and do not continue standing or walking until dizziness settles.
- Do you suffer from arthritis? Exercises may help to ease joint stiffness (see exercises towards end of booklet).

Alcohol

- Drinking alcohol may cause you to lose co-ordination and might exaggerate the effects of some medications. This might increase your risk of falling. Excessive drinking may also contribute to the

development of osteoporosis (thinning and weakening of the bones).

- Avoiding alcohol or reducing the amount you drink can help to reduce the risk of falls.

Walking aids

- If you use a walking aid, such as a stick or frame, are you using the walking aid provided for you? Has it been measured to the correct height?
- Have you checked the grip of the Ferrell (grip on base of stick/frame)?
- If you have any concerns about your walking aid, please contact the establishment who provided it to you.
- If you don't have a walking aid but feel you may benefit from one there are different options for you to obtain one. Your GP can refer you to be assessed by Rapid Response who can provide you with an appropriate aid. You can also privately purchase aids from various stores, including on the high street (such as Argos).

Exercise

- Research indicates that balance and strengthening exercises are highly recommended to help reduce the number or likelihood of falls.
- Are you doing some form of exercise daily – walking? Stretches? Chair exercises? Regular exercise, such as walking or dancing, can help to improve strength and balance.
- Please see helpful exercises at the end of this leaflet.

Pendant alarms

- A pendant alarm is ideal if you fall frequently and live on your own. It will prevent you from lying on the floor for long periods after a fall. They are easy to get installed.
- You can receive more information about pendent alarms by contacting Telecare via your local council or AgeUk (see contact details at the end of this leaflet).

What do I do if I have had a fall?

- Try to stay calm and don't panic.
- Try and get help if you can.
- If it's painful, don't move.
- Bang on walls or floors or use your alarm to attract attention.
- Call 999 immediately if you can reach a phone.

If you can't get help and are not hurt, try and get up:

1. Slowly ease yourself up onto your elbows.



2. Push up through your elbows to bring yourself onto your knees.



3. Crawl to a stable piece of furniture such as a chair.



4. Hold onto a firm surface to support yourself.

5. Using the support, bring yourself up onto one knee.



6. Push up through your arms and legs to help yourself stand up.



7. Keeping hold of the support, turn and sit down.



8. Rest for a while before attempting to stand.



What should I do if I am not able to get up?

Getting up off the floor is not easy. If you are not able to get up then follow these simple guidelines:

- Try not to panic
- If you have a pendant alarm, use it to attract attention
- Shout for help
- Attempt to crawl to the phone
- Ensure that you keep yourself warm by keeping your arms and legs moving
- Keep yourself comfortable, using cushions or blankets
- Roll away from any damp areas on the floor i.e. if there are any spillages.

Is there anything else I can do?

- You may want to consider fitting an additional phone that you can keep on the floor. If you fall, you can crawl to it without needing to stand up.
- Keep a folded up blanket on the floor so you don't get cold. You can reach for it if you are on the floor for a long time waiting for help. Place it somewhere safe where you won't trip on it.

What do I do if I have any concerns or questions regarding falls?

Don't be afraid to speak with someone if you are having any concerns or worries about falling. It's important to express any concerns you may have so you can be offered appropriate help and guidance.

Speak with your GP if you:

- have any concerns about your medications
- would like to be referred to a local falls clinic
- would like to be assessed by a physiotherapist for tailored advice and exercise.

Please see the list of useful contacts at the end of the leaflet. Some of these organisations may provide information regarding your specific concern.

What exercises can I do to help prevent falls?

The below exercises help to maintain movement and strength and improve balance.

Exercises should be done two times per day. You don't need to do all of them all at one time. Feel free to do one or two at a time.

Only do the below exercises if you feel confident with them. Do not do the exercises if they are painful, make you feel faint or unwell. If you feel too unsteady, stop doing that exercise. If you have any problems or concerns with the exercises, you may benefit from seeing a physiotherapist. Please speak with your GP regarding a physiotherapy referral.

It is important to try and stay motivated. It can take some time before you may feel the benefits of the exercises.

Exercises in sitting

1. Neck rotations



- Turn your head to one side to look over your shoulder.
- Remember to keep your shoulders facing forward.
- Repeat the exercise on the other side.
- Repeat 15 times.

2. Trunk rotations



- Turn your shoulders to one side.
- Remember to keep your hips facing forwards.
- Repeat in other direction.
- Repeat 15 times.

3. Ankle rocking



- Roll your feet backwards and forwards from your heels to your toes.
- Repeat 15 times.

4. Knee strengthening



- Pull your toes up.
- Tighten your thigh muscle(s).
- Straighten your knee.
- Hold for 10 seconds.
- Repeat 10 times.

Exercises in standing

If you managed the seated exercises well and feel confident in standing, you may want to try the standing exercises below. **Only complete the below exercises if you feel steady in standing.** Do not complete if you feel unsafe, unwell or dizzy.

1. Sit to stand

To stand up:

- Feet back and shoulder width apart.
- Hands on arm chair.
- Lean forwards.
- Stand.

To sit down:

- Reach back with one hand to the arm of the chair.
- Then with the other hand.
- Slowly bend your knees and sit down.
- Repeat 10 times.



2. Neck rotations in standing



- Turn your head to one side to look over your shoulder.
- Remember to keep your shoulders facing forward.
- Repeat this exercise towards the other side.
- Repeat 15 times.

3. Trunk rotations



- Cross your arms across your chest.
- Turn your shoulders to one side.
- Remember to keep hips facing forward.
- Repeat in the other direction.
- Repeat 15 times.

4. Ankle rocking



- Hold onto a secure object in front of you such as a kitchen work top.
- Roll your feet backwards and forwards from your heels to your toes.
- Repeat 15 times.

5. Squat



- Hold onto a secure object in front of you such as a kitchen work top.
- Position your feet shoulder width apart.
- Slowly bend both knees a little and then straighten.
- Repeat 10 times.

6. One leg stand



- Hold onto a secure object in front of you such as a kitchen work top.
- Bend one knee, lifting the foot up behind you.
- Hold this position for 10 seconds.
- Repeat this exercise with the other leg.
- Repeat 10 times.

7. Hip abduction



- Hold onto a secure object in front of you such as a kitchen work top.
- Keep your body as upright as possible.
- Keeping the leg straight, move one leg out to the side and then back in towards the middle again.
- Repeat this exercise with the other leg.
- Repeat 10 times.

8. Hip extension



- Hold onto a secure object in front of you such as a kitchen work top.
- Keep your body as upright as possible.
- Keeping the leg straight, move one leg out behind you and then back to the centre.
- Repeat this exercise with the other leg.
- Repeat 10 times.

9. Hip flexion



- Hold onto a secure object in front of you such as a kitchen work top.
- Raise one leg off the floor, bending the knee up in front of you, then gently lower again.
- Repeat this exercise on the other leg.
- Repeat 10 times.

10. Tandem stance



- Hold onto a secure object in front of you such as a kitchen work top.
- Stand with one foot in front of the other.
- Hold this position for 10 seconds.
- Repeat the exercise with the other foot in front.
- Repeat 10 times.

11. Timed unsupported stand



- Hold onto a secure object in front of you such as a kitchen work top.
- Slowly raise hands off the object so that you are standing unsupported.
- If you feel as though you are going to fall, place your hands back on the kitchen worktop immediately.
- Increase the time you are able to stand unsupported for.

12. Sideways walking



- Hold onto a secure object in front of you such as a kitchen work top.
- Keeping your shoulders facing forwards.
- Step sideways 5 steps to the left.
- Step sideways 5 steps to the right.
- Repeat 10 times.

Useful contacts in Surrey and nationwide

Age Concern Surrey

- Charity working with and for older people: provides free advice, helpful factsheets, local exercise and community groups.
- Telephone: 0800 009966 (free helpline)
- www.acsurrey.org.uk

Dial a Ride

- Provides accessible transport for residents of the Guildford Borough who are unable to use other means of transport.
- Telephone: 01483 458052

Disabled Living Foundation

- National charity providing free advice about all types of daily living equipment and mobility products.
- Telephone: 0845 130 9177 (helpline)
- www.dlf.org.uk

Meals on Wheels (Guildford)

- Provides hot or frozen meals to the door for elderly or disabled people within the Guildford Borough.
- Telephone: 01483 503010

Red Cross

- Help provide medical equipment, transport service and short term care in the home.
- Telephone: 0845 054 7222
- www.redcross.org.uk

Surrey Association for Visual Impaired (SAVI)

- Wide range of services for blind and partially sighted people in Surrey, including a well stocked resource centre providing equipment and professional advice.
- Telephone: 01372 377701
- www.surreywebsight.org.uk

Surrey Telecare

- Service which provides a range of sensors which link the community to lifeline alarms.
- Telephone: please see below website for specific contact number for your council
- www.surreytelecare.com

Age UK

- The Age UK Group works to improve later life for everyone by providing life-enhancing services and vital support.
- Telephone: 0800 169 6565
- www.ageuk.org.uk

Alzheimer's society

- Charity providing support for carers and sufferers of all kinds of dementia.
- Telephone: 0845 300 0336
- www.alzheimers.org.uk

Key reference sources

- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence:
Falls prevention 2013
- NHS Choices:
<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Falls/Pages/Prevention.aspx>

Contact details

If you have any further questions regarding this information please do not hesitate to call the Physiotherapy Department

Telephone: 01483 571122 **ext** 4153

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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