

Helping you to reduce your falls risk



Patient Information

Introduction

Falling is a common problem but it can often be avoided if some simple advice is followed. This booklet is full of ideas to help reduce your risk of falls and increase your confidence by taking control.

It includes advice on what to do if you, or someone else falls. Keep this booklet handy so that you can be reminded of the advice. We hope it will be of use to you.

Vision

Your eyesight helps you to move around safely and stay steady on your feet. You may have worn glasses for years, but that doesn't mean the lenses in your glasses are right for you now.

- Have your eyesight checked yearly
- Remember your eyesight tests are free if you are 60 or over
- Remember to wear your glasses as advised and keep them clean and in good condition
- Contact your optician to ask if they can visit you at home if you are unable to leave your home
- Take care on steps and stairs when you wear your glasses especially if you wear varifocals or bifocals
- If you are registered blind or partially sighted take extra care and make sure you access the support available from the eye department or social services.



Hearing

Problems with hearing can affect your balance. If you have difficulty hearing, your doctor can refer you to the hospital for checks. If you already wear a hearing aid make sure you maintain it by keeping it clean and replacing the batteries regularly.

Mobility

Feeling weak or unsteady can increase your risk of falls. Below is some basic advice to help you reduce this risk:

- A walking aid such as a stick or a frame may make you steadier. Ask for a physiotherapy assessment rather than purchasing one yourself so that an appropriate aid can be provided
- If you have a walking aid, check it for wear and tear regularly and change any rubber feet when worn
- Keep active: appropriate activities can improve bone density, muscle strength, balance and confidence to carry out daily activities.
- Before starting on any new physical activity, check with your doctor
- Warm up before and cool down after completing any exercise and do not exercise if you are tired, ill or have just eaten
- Gradually build up the amount of activity you do during the day and avoid sitting still for more than two hours at a time
- Contact your local council's sports development department for information on exercise classes
- Your doctor may refer you to a physiotherapist for specialist advice



Medicines

Some medicines can make you more likely to fall. Follow the advice below to minimise this risk:

- Follow the instructions for taking your medicines
- Attend the surgery for regular medication reviews
- Be aware of feelings of dizziness or drowsiness and speak to your doctor if you are concerned

Note: It is important you do not stop taking a medicine without first asking your doctor.



Dizziness

If you experience dizziness when you change position, you may find the following advice helps to prevent this:

- Get out of bed slowly and exercise your arms and legs before rising
- Sit back down again if you feel dizzy
- Stand still or walk on the spot when you first get up, don't rush off
- Drink plenty of fluids during the day
- Inform your doctor as he may need to review your medication

Bladder

Falls can occur when people have to rush to the toilet, or need to go frequently. There are a number of things you can do to keep your bladder healthy:

- Drink six to eight cups of fluid per day (about three pints or 1500ml)
- Try to minimise the amount of drinks containing caffeine or alcohol as they can irritate the bladder
- If you find it difficult getting to the toilet at night, a commode or urinal may be helpful



Footwear...and foot care

It is important to take care of your feet because problems like long toe nails, loss of feeling and poor footwear can make you unsteady, as well as causing discomfort.

- Wear footwear that protects and supports your feet
- Wear shoes with non-slip soles that are not too thick
- Avoid high heels and backless footwear
- Trim your nails or use a long handled file regularly
- Don't ignore minor foot problems. They are unlikely to get better by themselves. If you are in any doubt, see your doctor who may refer you to a NHS podiatrist. This is especially important if you have diabetes



Environment

Many falls occur within the home but following some simple advice can help to minimise the risk:

Bathroom

- Have someone in the house when you are in the bath / shower
- Use a non-slip bath mat
- Leave the bathroom door unlocked
- Don't have the water too hot
- Take your telephone or pendant alarm with you

Bedroom

- Have a light by the bed for getting up in the night
- Have a telephone or your pendant alarm by your bed

Callers

- Warn visitors that it may take a little longer to answer the door and try not to hurry to the door or telephone

Furniture

- Do not use furniture to support you when you walk as it may topple over

Hazards

- Keep rooms and stairways well lit
- Make sure rugs are tacked down or removed
- Make sure all electric wires and telephone cables are tucked away so you don't trip over them

If you are struggling with activities around the home, you may benefit from an Occupational Therapy assessment via Social Services or your GP.

What should I do if I have a fall?

If you are hurt or unable to get up:

- Summon help by using your pendant alarm, calling out, crawling to a telephone or banging on a wall
- Keep warm, check if there is a cover nearby
- Move to a softer surface if able
- Keep moving

If you are unhurt and feel you can get up:

- Roll over onto your hands and knees
- Crawl to a stable piece of furniture such as an armchair and use this to assist you with getting up
- Turn and sit on the chair or bed and rest for a while
- Always tell your doctor you have had a fall, even if you are not injured, as there may be something that can be done to prevent you falling again.



Alarms

If you are worried about falling when you are alone at home, you might want to get a pendant alarm to enable you to call for help even if you can't reach the telephone. There are also telecare sensors available such as falls detectors for people who would not be able to press a pendant alarm.

Useful Contact Numbers

Pendant Alarm Services:

Connect (Middlesbrough)
01642 726009
Homecall (Redcar and Cleveland)
01642 771339
Lifeline (Hambleton) 08452 007535
Lifeline (Richmondshire)
01748 829100

Welfare Rights / Citizen's Advice

Redcar and Cleveland 01642 771166
Middlesbrough 03444 111444

Age UK Teesside

Offering advice as well as social groups
/ events 01642 805500

Independent Living Centre:

(Middlesbrough)
Information on a wide range of
disability equipment 01642 250749

Falls Team

South Tees (Middlesbrough, Redcar and
Cleveland) 01642 944070
Hambleton & Richmondshire
01609 767522

Social Services

Redcar and Cleveland 01642 771500
Middlesbrough 01642 726004
Hambleton & Richmondshire
01609 780780

Comments, compliments, concerns or complaints

South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is concerned about the quality of care you receive and strives to maintain high standards of health care. However, we do appreciate that there may be an occasion where you, or your family, feel dissatisfied with the standard of service you receive. Please do not hesitate to tell us about your concerns as this helps us to learn from your experience and to improve service for future patients

If you have a concern or question regarding care of the service received, please discuss with /contact a member of the clinical team/matron in the first instance, who may be able to answer your questions without delay.

If you feel you cannot discuss your concern with the clinical team,

The Patient Advice and Liaison service can advise and support patients, families and carers and help sort out problems on your behalf. This service is available, and based, at The James Cook University Hospital but also covers the Friarage Hospital In Northallerton, our community hospitals and community health services. Please ask a member of staff for further information.

To ensure we meet your communication needs please inform the Patient Experience Department of any special requirements, i.e. Braille/ Large Print.

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