



Fall Proof:

Preventing falls and staying well

A guide on how to keep fit and well by avoiding some of the common causes of falls at home.



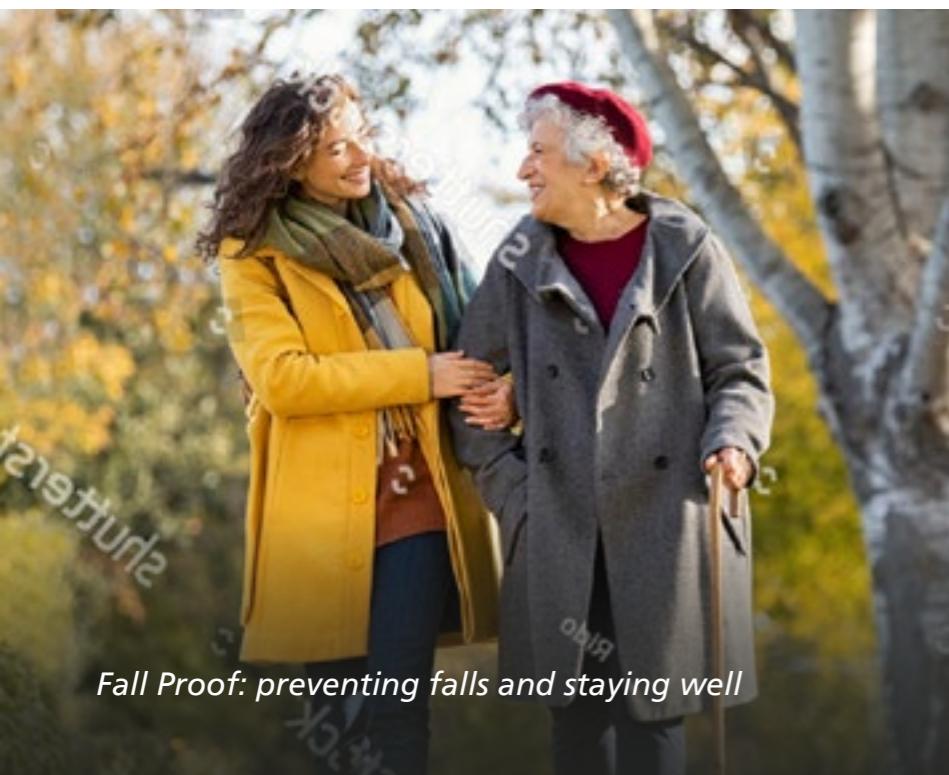
Preventing falls

Every year many people have falls at home. These falls can lead to **trips to the emergency department and serious injuries**.

Preventing falls can help to keep you active and healthy, ensuring you live your life well. In this guide we highlight some of the common causes of falls and how you can take action to decrease your chances of having a fall.

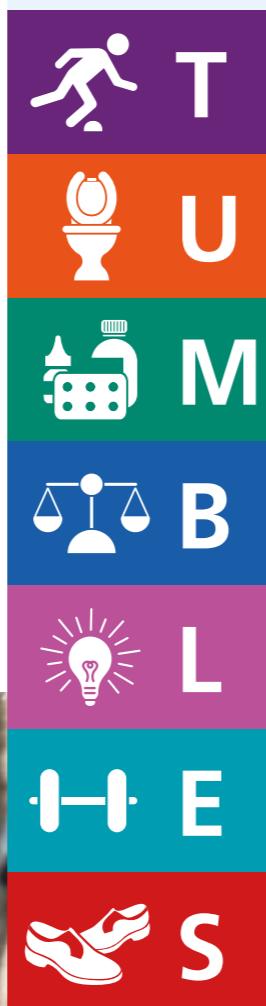
Falls are often caused by hazards that are easy to overlook but are easy to fix if you know what to keep an eye out for. The following pages set out how you can avoid losing balance or feeling dizzy, leading to a fall:

- Discover how your **health and lifestyle** may play a role in your chances of a fall and what changes you can make to lower the risk;
- Read about the **everyday hazards in your home** that increase the risk of you tripping; and,
- Find out **where you can get extra support** for concerns you may have.



Sections of this guide

This guide is divided into seven sections which each highlight risks that increase falls. Each section features a checklist of actions you can take to reduce your risk. The focus of each section is:



Trip Hazards



Urine and Hydration



Medication



Balance and Blood Pressure



Lighting and Eyesight



Exercise and Equipment

Slips, Shoes and Slippers

High risk areas



Hallways and porches

- Remove items that can cause trips like shoes or umbrellas.
- Don't rush** if your door bell rings. This can cause you to lose your balance or become dizzy.
- Clean up **slip hazards** from outside like mud or water.

Stairs

- Remove rugs and other **trip hazards**.
- Take care carrying items** like laundry. Try carrying them in a bag so that both arms are free and can hold on to the stair rail.

Bathrooms

- Use **non-slip mats** and **handrails** in showers, bathtubs and floors to avoid slips on patches of water.
- Consider handrails** to help you with getting up from a seated position on the toilet or in the bath.
- Use handrails to steady yourself and lights to see if you **get up in the night**.

Kitchens

- Clean up **food and water spills** and make sure the area is dry before walking over it.
- Avoid using **high shelves** and **step stools**. Stretching for items above you can cause you to lose your balance.

Gardens

- Avoid going outside into the garden **when icy**. Ask yourself if you can wait for the ice to thaw. Some services can also be slippery when wet.
- Place items like gardening tools somewhere safe, and be careful of **uneven surfaces, cracks and steps**.

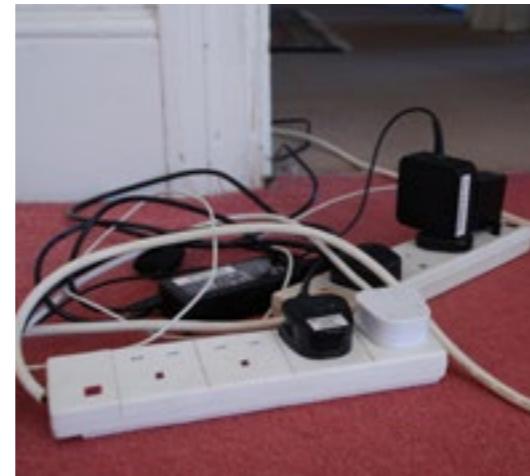
Trip Hazards



Every home will have furnishings and furniture that can potentially be trip hazards. Where these are located will play a significant role in increasing the risks.

When you walk through a room, make sure the floors are clear of obstacles

- If any furniture blocks your way, then **it should be moved somewhere** else.
- Items like blankets, magazines or shoes should be **kept off the floor**.
- Rugs can cause trips and it is best to **remove them**.
- Make sure wires run along walls and that you **never need to cross a wire** when walking around your home.
- Make sure that any carpet is not **loose or torn**.
- If you have pets, check they are not **resting** where you are walking or have **left a toy** in the middle of the room.



Make sure you do not rush when going around your house

- When going about your home for things like cooking, making tea or visiting the toilet, give yourself **plenty of time** to get there.
- **Don't rush** to the front door if it rings.
- Keep your phone **close to you** in case it rings.



Urine and hydration



Dehydration and urine infections can cause dizziness and confusion, which can all increase your chances of a fall. There are things you can do to reduce the risks.

Drink plenty of fluids throughout the day

- Make sure to **drink regularly**, especially water. You should drink enough during the day, so your pee is a pale clear colour.
- **Little and often** throughout the day is better than just one or two cups every few hours. Keep drinks within easy reach.
- Take care with **coffee, tea and alcohol**. These cause you to pee more.

Make sure you are steady when going to the toilet

- If you usually stand when you pee, consider **sitting down** instead or steady yourself on a washbasin or handrail.
- Be particularly **careful at night** as getting up from your bed quickly might make you dizzy, or your legs may be more unsteady than during the day.

Consider using a commode

- If you find getting to, or using the toilet is difficult you may benefit from **using a toilet aid**.
- **A commode is a portable toilet** with a removable pan. These can be kept by your bedside or by your side during the day.
- The British Red Cross provides a hiring service for toilet aids:
redcross.org.uk/get-help/hire-a-toilet-aid

Urine (wee) infections

a wee infection may make you **feel dizzy or confused**. If your wee is cloudy or smelly you may have an infection, contact your GP practice for advice.

Tablets to help pass wee

You may have been prescribed tablets to help your wee flow if you have 'prostate' problems. If these are making you feel dizzy or unsteady please speak to your doctor or nurse.

Tablets to control the urge to wee

Tablets are sometimes prescribed to help control the urge to wee, if you take these do they help? If they are not making a difference, ask your doctor about whether you should stop taking them.

Medication

Medications can have side effects like dizziness which can increase your risk of a fall.

Check to see if your medication increases your risk of a fall

- If you are taking any of the medication below, **Ask your pharmacist** about the effects they can have and any precautions you should take:

- Blood pressure tablets
- Heart medicines
- Muscle relaxers
- Laxatives
- Sleeping tablets
- Painkillers
- Antihistamines
- Diuretics or water tablets

Remember, **do not stop taking any prescribed medication without speaking to your GP first**. These have been prescribed to you to help manage your conditions.

Have regular medication reviews

- If you are taking medication on a regular basis, then these should be **regularly reviewed by a health professional**.
- Taking more than four medicines can increase your risk of having a fall. Ensure that a pharmacist or GP has reviewed your medications in the last **six months** to check they are still the most effective for you.



Alcohol

Alcohol can increase your risk of a fall by affecting your **balance**, or by contributing to dehydration.

Alcohol mixed with some medication can further increase your risk of having a fall. Be aware of these increased effects alcohol. If the medication's safety information or a health professional advises against drinking alcohol while on your medication, then please refrain from drinking.

i Tip: Sleep medication

Medicines to help you sleep should not be taken for long periods, ask your Doctor or nurse for help in stopping them.

Balance and Blood Pressure



Bed safety

If your bed is too high or too low, or your mattress too soft it will be difficult for you to get in and out of bed and you may fall (The usual bed height is 18 inches).

If you sit on the edge of your bed and your feet are flat on the floor and your knees are in line with your hips, then your bed height is correct for you.

Take things slow when standing up

- Blood pressure (BP) can **change suddenly** from when you are lying down then moving to standing or sitting.
- **Move slowly** standing up or getting out of bed to avoid feeling dizzy or sick.

Be careful when carrying objects

- Carrying objects can **put you off balance**. Avoid carrying heavy items and make sure to distribute the weight on both sides.
- **Ask for help** moving large objects, or take several trips if it is possible.
- Be **careful carrying items** like laundry **on stairs**. Don't carry too much. Try using a carrier bag or anything with straps you can rest on your shoulders. That way you can hold onto the stair rail with both hands.

Take care when reaching for items

- **Reaching for items** high up in cupboards, bookshelves etc. can put you off balance.
- Keep items you use regularly **within easy reach**. Avoid using shelves you need to stretch to reach or that require a step stool.

i Tip: Bone health

Bones become more brittle and fragile as you get older and need protecting. Calcium & Colecalciferol (Vitamin D) tablets are often prescribed for this, make sure you take them regularly.



Use good lighting at night

- **Poor lighting** is often the cause of a fall. Make sure there is enough lighting to help you move safely from one place to another.
- Some energy saving bulbs are **slow to produce a lot of light**. If these are in places like bathrooms, stairs and hallways, change to instant lighting to help you see better, alternatively leave them switched on.
- Make sure switches and cord pulls are **within easy-reach** during the night. A bedside lamp or a night light could be left on overnight. Have a torch close by.

Take care when exposed to direct sunlight or bright light

- bright lights like direct sunlight can **temporarily impair your vision**.
- On sunny days, if any of your rooms suffer from **daylight glare**, take extra care moving around.
- Remember **natural light is good** for you so try not to shut it out.

Make sure you use the correct glasses

- Make sure your glasses **fit properly** and are regularly cleaned.
- Put them in a **regular place** for easy reach and so you know where they are.
- Wear the correct glasses **for the task** i.e. reading glasses for all close work only. Do not walk around in reading glasses.
- Ensure all your glasses are clearly **labelled** as i.e. reading/closework or distance/TV.



Exercise can improve strength and balance, and reduce your risk of having a fall.

Exercise regularly

- Increasing activity **boosts strength and balance** and can help with mobility.
- There are **many different exercises** you can take up, depending on your abilities, interests and budget. These range from walking and exercises at home, to classes in gyms and community centres.
- If you have mobility issues, it is important to **speak to a physiotherapist or your GP first** before taking on any new activities. They can talk you from options and give you suggestions.
- If you are starting a new activity, seek advice or classes from a **professional instructor**. They can make sure you do the exercises correctly and avoid any injury.

Using equipment to help with mobility

- Equipment can help you with moving safely. If you have **problems with mobility**, talk to a physiotherapist or your GP about what equipment might be right for you.
- If you already use equipment, **check for wear and tear** on the rubber feet, hand grips and underarm pads to see if they need replacing. Make sure equipment is regularly maintained.
- If you think you're needs have changes, then contact your physiotherapist or equipment supplier.



Tai chi

There's evidence that taking part in regular tai chi sessions can reduce the risk of falls.

Tai chi is a Chinese martial art that places particular emphasis on movement, balance and co-ordination.

Unlike other martial arts, tai chi does not involve physical contact or rapid physical movements, making it an ideal activity for older people.

Tip: Equipment for mobility

- Walking sticks
- Walking frames
- Handrails
- Stairlifts
- Wheelchairs



Cuppa routine

How many cups of tea and coffee do you make every day?

How about using the two minutes it takes for the kettle to boil to do some simple exercises that can make a difference to your strength and balance.

The act of switching on the kettle acts as a trigger to remind you to do a simple routine. Other regular triggers could be brushing your teeth, checking your phone or emails, and switching on the television. Anything you do regularly each day can be a reminder.

Even two minutes of exercise can make a big difference. The Move it or Lose it website (moveitorloseit.co.uk/cuppa) has info on four exercises you can do and shows you how to do them properly:

- **Side leg raises** to strengthen the hips and bottom muscles which are vital for balance
- **Chair raises** to strengthen the thigh muscles to help with stair climbing and walking
- **Arm raises** strengthen the arms and shoulders to help with everyday tasks such as housework and gardening
- **Heel raises** strengthen the ankles and calf muscles to improve balance and walking

You can also find other ways to get moving on:

- NHS website nhs.uk/better-health/get-active
- Active Essex activeessex.org/ [ind-your-active](#)
- Check out Active Essex's **Able like Mabel** guide.



Remember to speak to a physiotherapist or your GP first before trying new routines if you have mobility, strength or balance issues.



Slips and spills

- Liquids on the floor or other surfaces carry the risk of slips. The kitchen and bathroom are areas of high risk of spills.
- Clean up food and liquid spills in the kitchen as soon as possible and avoid walking on the floor while it is wet.
- Use non-slip mats in the bathroom, in your bathtub and shower. Handrails can also help to prevent slips or falls when getting in and out of baths.
- If there is ice or frost outside in your garden or driveway, ask yourself if it is necessary for you to go outside or if it can wait until it has thawed.



Make sure you are wearing appropriate slippers or shoes

- Poorly fitting footwear will increase your falls risk.
- Avoid backless slippers, make sure your footwear fits properly and has a non-slip sole.
- Shoelaces can become a trip hazard, try slip on shoes instead.
- Avoid walking in socks or tights as these are more slippery.

i Tip: visiting a chiropodist

Do you suffer from corns or callouses, pain in your feet that make walking difficult? If so speak to a chiropodist for advice.

Being prepared

Personal alarms and monitoring systems can alert call centres or carers if you experience a problem, either at home or outside, such as a fall - you may hear this called telecare. Key safes can let family, carers and emergency services enter the property if you are unable to answer the door.

Personal alarms

Personal alarms allow you to get help if you have a problem or a fall at home. These can be a button or pull cord in your home, or can be worn on your body, for example around your wrist or neck.

These alarms can send an alert to a family member or a in case you have a fall.

Personal alarms can be bought quite cheaply online or at certain retailers.



Key safes

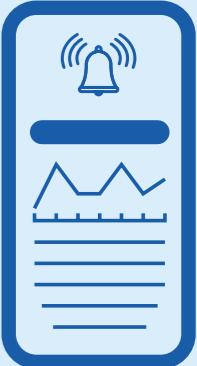
A key safe is a small box you lock that holds a key and can be bought online or in the high street.. This means carers, your family or emergency services can get into your home if you can't get to the door.

A key safe is fixed to an outdoor wall. You use a code – that you can choose – to open it.

Monitoring systems

Monitoring systems also send out alerts, but can detect a wider array of issues. They can include sensors for detecting movement, room temperature, incontinence or when appliances have been left on. Updates will be sent from the sensors to either family or carers, or are connected to a monitoring centre.

You can get basic home security systems online or on the high street. For systems connected to a monitoring service (telecare), contact the Telecare Services Association.



Where to get extra support

On this page you will find contact information and advice on where you can get extra support if you have concerns for yourself or someone you know.

Health, lifestyle advice and medicines

Speak to a health professional about any medical concerns you may have. Contact your GP practice to find out more about support for your mobility needs, and for general health and lifestyle advice if you have mobility, strength or balance needs.

Medicines

You can get a medicines review to discuss your medication and their effects with your pharmacist or GP.



Eyesight

For regular eye checks, please visit a local optician. If you are entitled to free NHS eye tests, you can find a site near you on the NHS website:

nhs.uk/service-search/find-an-nhs-sight-test/location



Can someone help me make my home safer?

Is there a service or organisation that people can contact to get an at home assessment for falls prevention?

Equipment support

Where do people get equipment? Does some get provided through the NHS/local authorities. What do they need to buy for themselves? Should we contact details for the LA adult social care services?



