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## *Avoiding slips, trips and falls*

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# ***Falling***

**As we grow older, gradual changes to our health and the medications we take can contribute to an increased risk of falling, but many falls can be prevented.**

Falls are often due to hazards that are easy to overlook but equally easy to fix. This booklet is split into two sections. The first section gives tips and advice on how to reduce the risk of falling at home.

The second is a self assessment form asking you about your general health and wellbeing. This will help you think about simple activities and interventions which can help you maintain your independence and reduce your risk of falling.

The booklet concludes with advice on how to deal with the fear of falling and what to do if you have a fall.

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# How to reduce the risk of falling in the home

There are many simple changes you can make around your home to reduce your risk of falling. In this booklet we will examine areas in the home and give you some handy tips on how to make your home safer.

## Floors

- Loose rugs and mats can be a trip hazard and should be avoided, if possible. If you do have rugs on the floor secure them with double-sided tape or a non slip backing so that the rugs won't slip.
- Have a clear path through each room so you don't have to walk around furniture.
- Keep your floors clear of items such as shoes, books, blankets and other objects.
- Try to organise your room so appliances are close to sockets. Coil or tape cords and wires next to the wall so that you can't trip over them.

**Avoid walking around the home with bare feet, tights, socks or loose fitting slippers, particularly on lino as it can be slippery.**

## Steps and stairs

- Always keep the stairs free of objects.
- Repair loose or uneven steps.
- Where you have carpet on steps make sure that it is firmly attached to every step. If not, ask someone to remove it and attach non slip rubber treads to the stairs.
- Ensure there is good lighting on the stairs, particularly at night. Night lights are low energy lights that plug into a main socket and emit a low level light. It is recommended that you use the dusk-to-dawn type that switches on automatically.
- If you have stair rails make sure they are securely fitted and, if possible, they are fitted to both sides of the stairs.

## Bathroom

- In the bath or shower, get a non slip rubber mat or use self-stick strips to secure your bath mat.
- If you require support when you get in and out of the shower/bath or up from the toilet have a grab rail fitted.
- Don't keep the bath mat on the floor. Move it once you're out of the bath.

## Bedroom

- Have a lamp close to the bed where it is easy to reach.
- Use a nightlight so you can see where you are walking at night.
- Ensure bed sheets and covers are not trailing on the floor. Tuck them out of the way when you first get into bed.
- If you use an electric blanket make sure the wires are not trailing on the floor.

**Make sure your electric blanket is tested by an expert at least every three years. You can ask the shop where you bought it about testing and servicing, or contact the trading standards department at your local council – they often have free testing days.**

## Kitchen

- Keep items you use regularly at working height.
- If you must use a step stool, get one with a bar to hold on to. Never use a chair.

## Garden

- Keep paths clear of leaves and overgrown plants.
- Moss and algae can make steps slippery when wet. There are products available to rinse off and remove algae.
- If you need to go outside and paths are icy, cover them in salt or sandy salt. Avoid going outside in icy conditions if possible.
- Never use a ladder when you are alone, it's far safer to have someone with you who can hold the ladder steady. If possible have someone to climb the ladder for you.
- When using power tools or an electric mower, make sure they are fitted with a residual current device (RCD). This shuts off the power if an electrical fault develops or if you accidentally cut through the cable.
- If you have a high step to get in and out of your property, ask someone to fit an additional step and grab rail.
- Always put garden tools, rakes and spades away.

## **Home improvement agencies**

There are local services available if you need help to get handrails and other useful aids fitted in your home. (see contacts page 20)

They help homeowners and private tenants to organise repairs, improvements and adaptations to their homes. The environmental health or housing department of your council, or a local Citizens Advice Bureau, should be able to tell you if there is a home improvement agency in your area. Find local addresses in your local library or telephone directory.

## ***Your falls risk reduction plan***

If you have had a fall or are worried about falling, this self assessment form is designed to help you think about simple activities and interventions which can help you to maintain your independence and reduce your risk of a fall.

Once you have completed this form, and if you have answered 'yes' to any of the questions, take this along to your doctor to discuss each of the points. He or she will be able to refer you to the appropriate services and help you with further advice.

# Question 1

**Have you had more than two falls in the last six months especially if you have hurt yourself, not been able to get up again and/or lost your confidence as a result of falling)?**

**Yes    No**

If you answered no, please go to question 2. If you answered yes, read on and discuss the points in the box below with your doctor.

- Talk with your doctor about your falls and/or concerns.
- Show this completed checklist to your doctor to help understand and treat your risks, and protect yourself from falls.
- Ask your doctor whether you could benefit from medication to help make your bones stronger.

How many falls have you had?

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How did you fall?

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Was your fall in your home or outdoors?

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Do you have any particular concerns or ideas about why you fell?

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## Question 2

Do you take four or more forms of medication daily?

Yes

No

If you answered no, please go to question 3. If you answered yes, read on and discuss the points in the box below with your doctor.

- Ask your doctor to review your medication.
- If you're unsure ask your doctor whether any of your medications can cause drowsiness, dizziness, or weakness as a side effect.
- Always, talk with your doctor about anything that could be a medication side effect or interaction, particularly if you recently started taking a new medication or changed the dose.

### List the medications you take and any side effects you may have

Name:

Side effect:

Name:

Side effect:

Name:

Side effect:

Name:

Side effect:

# Question 3

## Do you have any difficulty walking or standing?

(For example walking with a stick, walker or holding onto furniture when you walk.)

Yes

No

If you answered no, please go to question 4. If you answered yes, read on and discuss the points in the box below with your doctor.

- Tell your doctor about any increased difficulty walking.
- Tell your doctor if you have any pain, aching, soreness, stiffness, weakness, swelling, redness or numbness in your legs or feet – don't ignore these types of health problems.
- Ask your doctor whether you would benefit from a community exercise class for improving strength and balance, physiotherapy or treatment by a medical specialist.

### Please tick if you have experienced any of the following in your legs or feet

pain

soreness

weakness

numbness

aching

stiffness

swelling

redness

Other concerns/worries:

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## Question 4

Do you have to use your arms to be able to stand up from a chair?

Yes

No

If you answered no, please go to question 5. If you answered yes, read on and discuss the points in the box below with your doctor.

- Ask your doctor if you would benefit from a local Exercise Referral Programme in your area.
- Join a community exercise class aimed at improving strength and balance. Strength and balance classes may be offered locally by the NHS, You can contact NHS Direct Wales 0845 46 47 for the details of your local health board who can provide details of classes in your area.
- Contact your local library, leisure centre or local Age Cymru for details of local classes/groups.

**If you're not used to exercising, or have a health condition speak to your doctor before exercising on your own or joining a class.**

### Contact details of local exercise class

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## Question 5

Do you ever feel dizzy or light-headed, if, for example, you get up or turn around too quickly?

Yes

No

If you answered no, please go to question 6. If you answered yes, read on and discuss the points in the box below with your doctor.

- Ask your doctor to check your blood pressure, both when you are standing and when you are lying down.
- Ask your doctor to review your medication if you notice any of the above symptoms.

### Your personal log

Blood pressure when sitting down:

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Blood pressure when standing:

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Blood pressure when lying down:

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Recommendations:

Date:

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# Question 6

Has it been more than two years since you had your eyes tested?

Yes

No

If you answered no, please go to question 7. If you answered yes, make an appointment for an eye test to help protect your eyesight and balance.

- If you are aged 60 or over you can have a free NHS eye test at any opticians. If your over 70 you should have your eyes tested every year. Take along something which proves your age, such as a passport, driving licence or NHS medical card, and fill out the form which the optometrist will give you. If you need a NHS home visit, this should be free as well.
- Always wear glasses as prescribed and clean them regularly.

### Contact details of your optician

Appointment date:

Appointment time:

Recommendations:

# Question 7

Is your hearing affecting your ability to enjoy life, socialise, talk on the phone or listen to the television?

Yes

No

If you answered no, please go to question 8. If you answered yes,

- Make an appointment with your doctor and tell them your concerns about how your hearing is affecting your daily life and they will refer you for a hearing test.
- If hearing aids are recommended, practice how to use them correctly.

Appointment date:

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Appointment time:

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Recommendations:

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# Question 8

Do you take part in regular exercise?

Yes

No

Please see below for useful advice about exercise.

- Some physical activity is better than none, and more physical activity provides greater health benefits. Take every small opportunity to be active, such as taking the stairs or doing manual tasks. At weekends, consider longer walks, cycling or swimming.
- Join a community exercise class aimed at improving strength and balance in older adults. Ask your doctor or local Age Cymru to put you in touch with the nearest group in your area.
- You should aim for one hundred and fifty minutes (2.5 hours) of moderate-intensity physical activity each week. One way to do this is to do thirty minutes on at least five days per week. Targets can be achieved in ten-minute slots spread throughout the day.

How many times a week do you exercise and for how long?

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What forms of exercise?

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Recommendations:

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# Question 9

**Do you drink alcohol?**

**Yes**

**No**

If you answered no, please go to question 10.

If you answered yes,

- Limit yourself to one alcoholic drink a day to help avoid falls.
- Check the patient information leaflet that comes with your medication or ask your pharmacist whether alcohol can affect your medication.
- If you suspect that alcohol affects your balance, reduce it or cut it out and discuss this with you doctor.
- The Department of Health recommends that men should drink no more than three to four units of alcohol a day, and that women should drink no more than two to three units of alcohol a day. For example a small glass (125ml) of wine is 1.5 units and a large glass (250ml) is 3 units. A 330ml bottle of beer/lager/cider is 1.7 units and a pint of higher strength beer/lager/cider is 3 units. A single shot (25ml) of a spirit is 1 unit.

Approximately how many alcoholic drinks do you drink a day?

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Approximately how many alcoholic drinks do you drink a week?

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Recommendations:

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# Question 10

## Do you have any long-term health conditions?

For example, heart or lung problems, diabetes, high blood pressure or arthritis. Ask your doctor if you are unsure.

Yes

No

If you answered yes, read on and discuss the points in the box below with your doctor.

- Ask your doctor what you should do to stay healthy and active with your health conditions.
- Ask your doctor if there are any patient groups such as EPP Cymru in your area. They offer a range of self-management health and well being courses and workshops for people living with a health conditions or for those who care for someone with a health condition. (see page 19)
- Report any changes to your health or to how you're feeling to your doctor.
- Keep your medical appointments.

Recommendations:

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### Next steps

If you have answered yes to several of these questions you may be at a greater risk of falling. Take this form with you to your doctor who can discuss your answers, if necessary, and refer you onto appropriate services and help for further advice.

Remember be aware of what can cause falls, and take care of yourself to stay independent and at a reduced risk of falling.

## *Dealing with the fear of falling*

We all stumble or trip sometimes. But fear of falling can start to become a serious worry and can be quite difficult to deal with if not addressed quickly.

This anxiety may stem from having had a fall already, but it can prey on your mind, even if you haven't fallen before. This sometimes happens after a period of illness, which can leave you feeling weak and a bit unsure of yourself. Consequently you may become more cautious, limit what you're willing to do and lose confidence in carrying out daily tasks and activities. You may even stop wanting to go out on

your own. Worrying in this way isn't unusual, but can make you anxious, isolated or depressed.

Fears about losing your independence can also make you reluctant to seek help. Perhaps you're worried that people will think you're unable to look after yourself properly, or that they'll suggest you move into a care home. However, it's important not to let such thoughts stop you from taking positive steps to get help. A good falls prevention service will enable you to live as independent and enjoyable a life as possible. This is the case whether you've had a fall already or are intent on preventing one.

**Talk to your doctor, who can refer you to your local falls prevention service. You can work out how to get your confidence back, regain your balance and strength, and reduce your risk of falling.**



# **What to do if you fall**

## **1. Try to stay calm and not panic**

## **2. Get help if you can**

- Don't move if you feel pain.
- Try to attract attention by banging on the floor or wall; use a personal call alarm if you have one.
- Call 999 if you can reach a phone.

## **3. If you can't get help, and you are not hurt, try to get up**

- First, check that you are not hurt.
- Then roll on to your hands and knees and crawl to a sturdy piece of furniture: for example, a chair or bed.
- Put your hands on the chair or bed and bring one leg up, bending your knee and placing your foot flat on the floor.
- Lean forwards, pushing with your hands and foot and bring your other foot up so that it is also flat on the floor and you are crouching.

- Turn and sit on the furniture.
- Make sure you rest for a while before you try to stand up.

## **4. If you are hurt or can't get up, keep yourself warm**

- Cover yourself with a coat or anything else you can find.
- Keep tensing your arm and leg muscles and roll from side to side if you can to keep moving.
- If you have fallen on a hard floor, try to crawl to a softer, carpeted area if possible.

## Useful contacts

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### Age Cymru

Runs two physical activity programmes in Wales to encourage older people to become more active:

- **Nordic Walking**

Nordic Walking opportunities take place across Wales and are suitable for all ages and fitness levels. You walk using a pair of specially designed, lightweight poles that provide additional support meaning you get more from the exercise.

- **Low Impact Functional Training (LIFT)**

Trained volunteers deliver low level activities and games to older people in the community.

Tel: 029 20431 555

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65

Email: [ageingwell@agecymru.org.uk](mailto:ageingwell@agecymru.org.uk)

Website: [www.agecymru.org.uk](http://www.agecymru.org.uk)

### Age UK

Age UK produces the following resources that you may find useful:

- Staying Steady - improving your strength and balance.
- Home safety checker
- Caring for your eyes
- Healthy living

### **Strength and Balance Exercises for Healthy Ageing**

(price £6)

An A4 ring-bound, table-top flip chart with simple illustrations and step-by-step instructions for chair and non-chair-based exercises.

### **Be Strong, Be Steady**

(price £12)

A strength and balance exercise DVD that includes chair-based and standing exercises, available in English.

To order these titles, call Age UK Advice 0800 169 65 65

Prices do not include postage and packing.

## Lets Walk Cymru

Provides information about walking in Wales, specifically related to health walks programmes. Contact them for information on walks in your area.

Tel: 029 20338 357

Email:

[letswalkcymru@sportwales.org.uk](mailto:letswalkcymru@sportwales.org.uk)

[www.lets-walk-cymru.org.uk](http://www.lets-walk-cymru.org.uk)

## Exercise referral schemes

Exercise referral schemes are designed to help people who would benefit from regular exercise. They are aimed at people with medical conditions that put their health at risk and people who are at risk through a non-active lifestyle. Ask your doctor if you qualify for the scheme.

During an exercise referral scheme, you will meet an exercise specialist, such as a personal trainer, for several sessions each week. Your trainer will design an exercise programme that is specifically tailored to your needs and requirements. They can also offer you support and guidance throughout the course.

## NHS Direct Wales

NHS Direct Wales is a health advice and information service available 24hours a day, every day for information on any health related matters or concerns. You can also search for local health services such as pharmacists, GP's, health boards in your area. Tel: 0845 46 47  
[www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)

## EPP Cymru

EPP Cymru have regional co-ordinators across Wales that provide a number of self-management courses and workshops for people living with any long-term health condition. To find out more contact your local co-ordinator. You can access their details via NHS Direct Wales.

## EXTEND

Arranges community-based exercise classes for older people and trains teachers to tutor exercise classes.

Tel: 01582 832760

Email: [admin@extend.org.uk](mailto:admin@extend.org.uk)

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

## Care and Repair Cymru

Care and Repair Cymru is the national body for Care and Repair in Wales, and the Older People's Housing Champion. The 22 Care and Repair Agencies across Wales help older people to remain living in their own homes with increased independence and dignity. This is achieved by carrying out and facilitating adaptations, repairs and improvements for older people in their own homes.

Tel: 0300 111 3333 (Local rate number) to be connected to your local Care and Repair Agency  
[www.careandrepair.org.uk](http://www.careandrepair.org.uk)

## The Royal Society of Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

Promotes safety and prevention of accidents at work and in the home, and provides information on home safety.

Tel: 0121 248 2000  
Email: [help@rospa.com](mailto:help@rospa.com)  
[www.rospa.com](http://www.rospa.com)



Tŷ John Pathy, 13-14 Neptune Court  
Vanguard Way, Cardiff CF24 5PJ  
Tel: 029 2043 1555  
[www.agecymru.org.uk](http://www.agecymru.org.uk)

Age Cymru is a registered charity 1128436. Company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales 6837284.  
Registered office address: Tŷ John Pathy, 13-14 Neptune Court Vanguard Way, Cardiff CF24 5PJ

## DAN 24/7; All Wales Drug And Alcohol Helpline

Tel: 0808 808 2234  
Available 24 hours a day 365 days a year to answer questions and offer advice.

## RNIB Cymru (Royal National Institute for the Blind)

Services, advice and information including leaflets and publications, many of which are available in large print, Braille or audio CD/ tape. Can give details of local sight loss support groups.

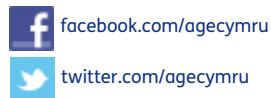
Tel: 029 2045 0440  
Email: [cymruevents@rnib.org.uk](mailto:cymruevents@rnib.org.uk)

## Action on Hearing Loss Cymru

A range of services, advice and information on hearing loss. They also offer telephone hearing checks.

Tel: 0808 808 0123 (freephone)  
Text: 0808 808 9000 (freephone)  
Telephone Hearing Check Phonenumber 0844 800 3838  
Email: [informationline@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:informationline@hearingloss.org.uk)

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