



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

How to prevent falls and improve your safety

Information for patients,
relatives and carers

Falls are a common problem, but you can reduce your risk by keeping mobile and carrying out regular, safe activity to remain independent.

Eating well, keeping fit and looking after your bones is important. However, there are other things you can do to improve your strength and balance. Exercises to strengthen your muscles and to improve your coordination and balance are one of the most effective ways to reduce the risk of falling.

There are many groups and classes available at local leisure centres that offer balance training, or an exercise programme can be carried out at home under the guidance of a professional. Information on local exercise groups can be obtained from your local council or social services.

You will benefit most from an exercise programme specifically designed to meet your needs and by completing it regularly. Remember, that reducing your physical activity can actually make you more at risk of falling.

Your GP can refer you to the Falls Clinic at the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust. At the Falls Clinic the consultant will check your medication and try to establish if there is a medical reason for your falls, the physiotherapist will give you advice on exercise and mobility, the nurse will check your blood pressure and the occupational therapist will assess your function and provide advice, equipment for independence, and a home assessment if necessary.

Get the best out of your eyesight

Your vision plays an important part in your sense of balance and movement. It is a good idea to have your eyes checked every two years. Eye tests are free if you are aged 60 or over. Be aware that reading glasses and bifocals can make objects appear closer than they really are which can cause you to trip or over-reach for items.

Make sure your glasses are clean and well fitting. If you go from light to dark, or the other way around, stop and give your eyes time to adjust before moving.

.... and your hearing

Ears and hearing are closely involved with balance. Ear infections can upset your balance as can a build-up of wax in the ear canals. Make a list of situations where your hearing is difficult and tell your GP of your concerns.

Medications: Use them properly to work for you

Some medicines can have side effects which make you feel faint or unsteady. This includes non-prescription and over-the-counter medications and supplements. Let your doctor know if you sometimes feel faint or unsteady owing to medicine side effects.

If you take more than four kinds of medication, ask your doctor or pharmacist to check them regularly. Do not mix alcohol with medications as this can cause dizziness and lack of balance.

Once you reach 60 years of age, prescription medicines are free of charge. Some pharmacists will collect your

prescriptions from the surgery and some will deliver to your home. If you have difficulty remembering to take your medicine it may help to use a memory-aid container – some have a reminder alarm or recorded message. Ask your pharmacist for information.

Safe home environment:

Look at your home to eliminate trip hazards and risk:

- Good lighting is important – use the brightest light bulbs your light fitting safely allows. Make sure your stairs are well lit. If you need to get up in the night, switch on a light or use plug-in nightlights to illuminate your route from bedroom to toilet.
- Stairs – get into the habit of using a handrail and consider having a second rail fitted. Try to avoid going up and down stairs carrying awkward items or possibly dangerous ones, like hot drinks.
- Keep the floor clear of trailing wires, loose mats, fraying carpets or anything else you may trip on.
- Stand up slowly after lying down or sitting. Take care when bending down and make sure you are steady before walking. Be especially careful when you are ill and weaker, for example with sickness or diarrhoea.
- A stool or chair in the bathroom is useful so you can sit on a chair to dry yourself.
- Don't lock your bathroom door in case you need help.
- Higher chairs with solid arm rests and a raised toilet seat and rails make it easier to sit down and stand up.

- Beds should be at good height for easy movement on and off.
- Realistically consider what chores are now too risky for you to do and arrange for someone else to do them, eg changing overhead light bulbs. In particular, avoid anything that involves you getting up higher than floor level.
- In the garden, watch out for slippery wet grass and uneven surfaces.
- Keep warm – cold muscles work less well. Make sure that you do not turn off the heating to save money.
- Don't rush – the phone can wait. Use the "last number" service (1471 on most phones) to return the call in your own time or consider a cordless or mobile phone and extra telephone extensions around the house. Get your telephone positioned by your chair.
- Fit a letter box cage to avoid stooping to pick up letters.
- Fitting a key safe can enable permitted friends, relatives or carers to access your house if you are unable to answer the door.

Using the toilet safely

Incontinence may increase the risk of falls when hurrying to the toilet, particularly at night. Urine infections can mean you need the toilet more often and more urgently so it is important to take extra safety precautions. Episodes of incontinence may be temporary and often related to an illness such as urine infection.

- Consider a bedside commode or urinal if not near toilet.
- Use the toilet regularly every few hours rather than waiting for the urge. This may avoid rushing to the toilet and falling.
- Wear suitable clothes that can be easily and quickly undone.
- Keep the pathway to the toilet obstacle-free and lit: leave a night-light on in the bathroom/bedroom at night.
- Try cutting down on tea and coffee – use brands without caffeine, or drink water or soft drinks.
- Avoid constipation by eating plenty of fibre.
- If you have problems with continence, contact your district nurse for advice – via your GP's surgery.

Looking after your feet

- Never ignore minor foot problems – symptoms such as pain, soreness and redness should be checked out as they may lead to more serious problems, reduced mobility and reduced balance.
- It is important to choose suitable shoes (lightweight shoes for indoor use) that fit well – usually high sided with low heels and cushioned soles. Ask your district nurse or podiatrist for advice.
- Avoid walking on slippery floors in socks or tights.
- A long-handled shoe horn may help you put on your shoes.

Anxiety about falling

It is important to tell your GP or district nurse if you have had a fall or are feeling unsteady. You may be anxious as a result of the falling or just worried about falling. It is important to remember that there are ways to get your confidence back.

Fainting, blackouts and unexplained falls

If you have experienced a fall as a result of dizziness, fainting or blackout, or you cannot remember why you fell, this could be caused by a medical condition. Make sure you tell your GP if this happens to you.

Osteoporosis – Strengthen your bones!

Osteoporosis is a loss of bone density which causes bones to become fragile and liable to break very easily. The health of your bones can make a big difference to the effect a fall will have on you.

You can keep your bones healthy by eating a diet rich in calcium and Vitamin D, and taking regular weight-bearing exercise (such as brisk walking). It is never too late to give up smoking and limit the amount of alcohol you drink.

Fluids

Water, fruit juices or tea are necessary to ensure the functioning of all the body's organs. Not drinking enough may result in reduced blood pressure and falls. Try to drink two litres (four pints) of fluid each day, especially in hot weather. If you have difficulty getting to the toilet, do not restrict your

fluid intake, but contact your district nurse for advice. If you need to get up in the night, a commode or urine bottle may help.

Community alarms and monitors

Many of the problems after a fall, such as pneumonia and hypothermia, are due to the person falling and lying on the floor for long periods. Community alarms allow you to call for help even if you can't reach a telephone. You contact a 24-hour response centre by pressing a button on a pendant or wrist band, then staff at the centre will contact someone who can help you.

If you live, or are frequently, alone at home, and are at risk of falling, it is especially important to get a community alarm. If you are worried about a confused friend or relative falling, contact your local social services for advice or contact one of the call alarm providers listed in the table on page 15.

If you have an alarm, make sure you wear it every day and have it in reaching distance when you take it off to wash or sleep.

When you are ill

- If you are feeling unwell, make sure you tell a friend or relative.
- If you have diarrhoea, sickness or have difficulty eating over a period of a few days, contact your GP - becoming weak and dehydrated increases your risk of falls.

Mobility aids

- A mobility aid – such as a walking frame, or walking stick – could help you if you are unsteady on your feet or have difficulty getting about.
- Always get advice from your doctor or physio on which walking aid is the most suitable for you and how to use it.
- If you have a walking aid it is best to periodically check that the rubber ferrule (tip) on the end hasn't worn through and still has a visible tread. If it needs replacing, most high street chemists sell these.
- Carrying food and drink into another room is often difficult and dangerous if you use a walking aid. If this is a problem discuss with your district nurse or therapist.

Wheelchairs

The NHS provides specialist wheelchairs free to people who need them on a long-term basis following referral from a healthcare professional. Short-term loan wheelchairs can be accessed via the Red Cross.

Your local Shopmobility scheme may loan electric wheelchairs around town centre/shopping centres.

What to do if you fall

1. Keep calm and compose yourself.
2. Check your body. If you are not badly injured, think about getting up: don't move if you are in pain. Try to attract attention by banging on the floor or wall (if you have immediate neighbours); use your personal alarm or call 999 if you can.
3. If you can't get help and are not hurt, try to get up.
 - Look around for a sturdy piece of furniture (such a chair).
 - Roll onto your side.
 - Crawl or drag yourself over to the chair.
 - From a kneeling position, put your arms up onto the seat of the chair.
 - Bring one knee forward and put that foot on the floor.
 - Push up with your arms and legs and pivot your body around.
 - Sit down. Rest before trying to move.
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 moving as much as you can and try to move to a softer, carpeted and warmer area. Think through all the possibilities for raising the alarm and getting up.

Knowing how to safely help someone up

It is important to not injure the person or yourself when attempting to help them up. Assess the task carefully: if the person is in pain, or you do not have the physical ability to help, call an ambulance.

If you feel the person can get up easily, do not hurry but plan the action carefully, being ready to change your mind at any stage. If you get stuck at any time, make them comfortable and call an ambulance.

1. Do not try to get the person up straight away, even if you know you have the strength to lift them.
2. Calm the person and then yourself.
3. Check for injuries. If they are badly injured, such as with a broken bone, they need to stay where they are. Make them as comfortable as possible and call an ambulance. Keep them warm.
4. If they are not badly injured and feel they could get up, get two sturdy chairs and place one near the person's head and one near their feet.
5. It is important that the fallen person does the work. The helper should only guide lightly, helping the person to roll onto their side.
6. Help the person to kneel. If they have sore knees, place a towel or cushion underneath.
7. Place one chair in front of the kneeling person.
8. Ask the person to lean on the seat of the chair and bring one leg forward and put that foot on the floor.
9. Place the second chair behind the person. Ask them to push up with their arms and legs and then sit back in the chair behind them. Guide them up and back into the seat, remembering not to lift. Keep your back upright.
10. Let the person's GP know that they have had a fall.

Local social service departments are responsible for arranging services which help older people remain in their own homes. If you need help, contact your local social services department for an assessment.

Useful contacts:

Royal Berkshire Hospital	0118 322 5111 (Switchboard)
Ridgeway Care and Repair	01635 588811 bwcr@asterliving.co.uk www.ridgewaycommunity.org.uk
Stair lifts (new, reconditioned or rental)	Dolphin Lifts: 01202 880468
Sovereign Housing Group	01635 550222/ 01189757888 www.sovereign.org.uk
Community Action West Berks (<i>central contact point for local voluntary/community groups.</i>)	01635 323861
Disabled Living Foundation	0300 999 0004 www.dlf.org.uk
National Osteoporosis Society	0207 427 2460 www.nos.org.uk
NHS 111	111 www.nhs.uk/
Opticians at Home (<i>Lloyds Pharmacy</i>)	0800 854 477
Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)	Berkshire Healthcare: 0118 960 5027
Patient Relations (RBH)	0118 322 8338
Parkinson's UK	0808 800 0303 www.parkinsons.org.uk

Berkshire Carer's Hub	0118 324 7333 www.berkshirecarershubs.org/
ReadiBus	0118 931 0000
Red Cross Berkshire	0118 9358230
Royal British Legion	0808 802 8080
Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)	0303 123 9999 www.rnib.org.uk
Action on Hearing Loss	0808 808 0123 www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk
Shoes: Cosy Feet Shoes	01458 447275 www.cosyfeet.com
Stroke Association	0303 303 3100 www.stroke.org.uk
Home energy saving advice service	0800 512 012
Age UK Handyhelp	0118 959 4242
NRS equipment collection	0844 8936960 (option 3)
Age UK stairlift free advice/quotes	0800 910 0258

Ready meals deliveries (including special diets):

Apetito	01225 560127
Oakhouse Farm Foods	0333 370 6700 www.oakhousefoods.co.uk
Wiltshire Farm Foods	0800 0773100 www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com

Shopmobility:

Bracknell	01344 861316
Newbury	01635 523854 www.volunteerwestberks.org.uk
Reading	0118 965 9008 www.theoracle.com

Reading:

Social prescribers: (<i>signposting people to activities and services in the community</i>)	0118 937 2103
Alzheimers Society:	0118 959 6482
Arthritis Care:	0118 957 1601

Wokingham:

Involve: (<i>Signposting people to activities and services in the community</i>)	01344 313 515/ 01344 304 404
Link visiting: (<i>1:1 visiting service in Wokingham for people who experience loneliness and social isolation.</i>)	www.linkvisiting.org/ referral-form
Long Term Health Care Manager (Co-ordinator of activities for older people) <i>Sian Wide</i>	0118 908 8254/ 0777 183 4467
SHINE: (<i>Older adults Physical Activity Programme 60+</i>)	shine@wokingham.gov.uk www.wokingham.gov.uk/SHINE
Wokingham Falls Project (Steady steps)	0118 974 3728

West Berkshire:

Volunteer Centre: (<i>Information, advice and guidance</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Handybus scheme (Newbury)</i>• <i>Shopmobility (Newbury)</i>• <i>Car and driver scheme (Newbury)</i>• <i>VCme- mental health support service</i>	0163549004
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Bracknell and East Berkshire:

British Red Cross Home from Hospital	07841 863674 hfhbracknell@redcross.org.uk
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Call alarms:

Age UK Personal Alarm Service	0800 011 3846 www.ageuk.org.uk
Forest Care	01344 786599 www.bracknellforest.gov.uk
Lifeline24	0800 9990400

Social Services: *contact for further assessment or to enquire about services and equipment available.*

Bracknell Forest Council Social Services	01344 351500
Oxford County Council	HART: 01865 572 917 Social Services: 01865 235 433/ 01865 235 424
Reading Council Community Care	0118 937 3747
West Berks Council Health and Social Care	01635 292130 www.westberks.gov.uk
Wokingham District Council Community Care Services (includes Falls Advice)	0118 974 6892 www.wokingham.gov.uk/health-social-care/older-people/falls

Please note the above companies are listed for information; we are not recommending their service or product in any way nor indicating they are to be used above any other similar company. You should make your own assessment of any company you choose to contact for their services.

Notes:

Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust
London Road
Reading RG1 5AN
0118 322 5111 (switchboard)
www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Inpatient Therapy Department, November 2017
Review due: November 2019