Falls Prevention Guide



NATIONAL ORTHOPAEDIC HOSPITAL CAPPAGH



Around 1 in 3 of older adults fall at least once a year

Introduction

Falls are a common but often overlooked source of injury.

Not all falls result in injury, but some do. For example:

- 20% of older adults need to see a doctor after a fall
- 5% of older adults experience a serious injury, such as a fracture

Falls can also cause a person to become fearful and to lose their confidence.

It is not possible to eliminate the risk of falling altogether, however, there are measures that can be taken to:

- Reduce the risk
- Help you if you should fall

Question 1: Have you recently had a fall?



If you have fallen, it's important to know why.

Ask your GP to refer you to a Falls Prevention expert (Doctor, Nurse, Pharmacist, Occupational Therapist and Physiotherapist) who will:

- Complete a falls assessment to work out what caused you to fall
- Work with you to reduce your risk of repeat falls
- Provide you with practical information on what to do when you fall

Question 2: Do you ever feel light-headed or dizzy when you stand?



When you stand up, your blood pressure can drop. This can make you feel dizzy, which can put you at risk of falling. If this happens, you should:

- Speak to your Doctor straight away. They may need to check your blood pressure
- Take your time moving from a sitting to a standing position and steady yourself before you walk
- Move from a lying position to a sitting position for a few minutes before standing and walking
- Make sure you eat and drink often

Question 3: Has your medication recently changed?



Speak to your doctor right away if you:

- Notice a change in your balance
- Are feeling dizzy

Question 4: Do you take more than one medication?



Being on four or more medications increases your risk of falling. Take the following steps to stay safe:

- Do not take any medication without the advice of your Doctor or Pharmacist
- Take medications and tablets as instructed by your Doctor
- Ask your doctor to review your medication regularly and stop any medications that you no longer need
- If you are over 65 years of age, your Doctor should review your medication once a year
- If you are having trouble managing your medication, ask your Pharmacist for help
- Wear your hearing aid all the time

Question 5: Do you have trouble with your eyesight?



Being able to see dangers in your environment is important to reduce your risk of falling.

Make sure to:

- Get your eyesight tested every year
- Make sure your glasses are in good condition and cleaned often
- Have good lighting in all areas of your home
- Buy a bedside light
- Always turn on a light when you go to the toilet at night
- Keep a night light switched on in your bedroom / hallway
- Pause to give your eyes times to adapt to changes in light intensity
- Keep rooms clear of obstacles
- If you have difficulty seeing steps, put bright tape on the edge of the steps to make the change in height very clear

Question 6: Do you have trouble with your hearing?



Being able to listen out for dangers in your environment is important to reduce your risk of falling.

Make sure to:

- Get your hearing tested every year
- If you use a hearing aid, keep spare batteries nearby and always wear the aid
- Wear your hearing aid all the time

Question 7: Do you feel unsteady when walking?

If you feel unsteady on your feet, ask your Doctor to send you to a Physiotherapist and Occupational Therapist. Your Physiotherapist will give you exercises to improve your balance and advise on what walking aids best suited to your needs. Your Occupational Therapist will give you recommend alternative ways to carry out daily activities and improve home safety.

- If you have had more than one fall in the last year, ask your Doctor to send you to a falls clinic or age-related care clinic
- If you are given a walking aid, for example a walking stick, make sure you know how to use it and use it at all times
- Gentle exercise can improve your balance and strengthen your muscles. This can reduce your risk of falling
- Be active every day. Walking, gardening, making your dinner.... every little bit helps!

Question 8: Do you have difficulty getting to the toilet on time?



Rushing to the toilet can increase your risk of falling. The following advice can be helpful:

- Walk slowly to the toilet
- Get into the habit of going to the toilet regularly, even if you don't need to
- Speak to your Doctor about medications that can alter changed your bladder or bowel habits
- If you need to use the toilet frequently overnight, consider using a urinal bottle or commode beside your bed

Question 9: Have you ever broken a bone?

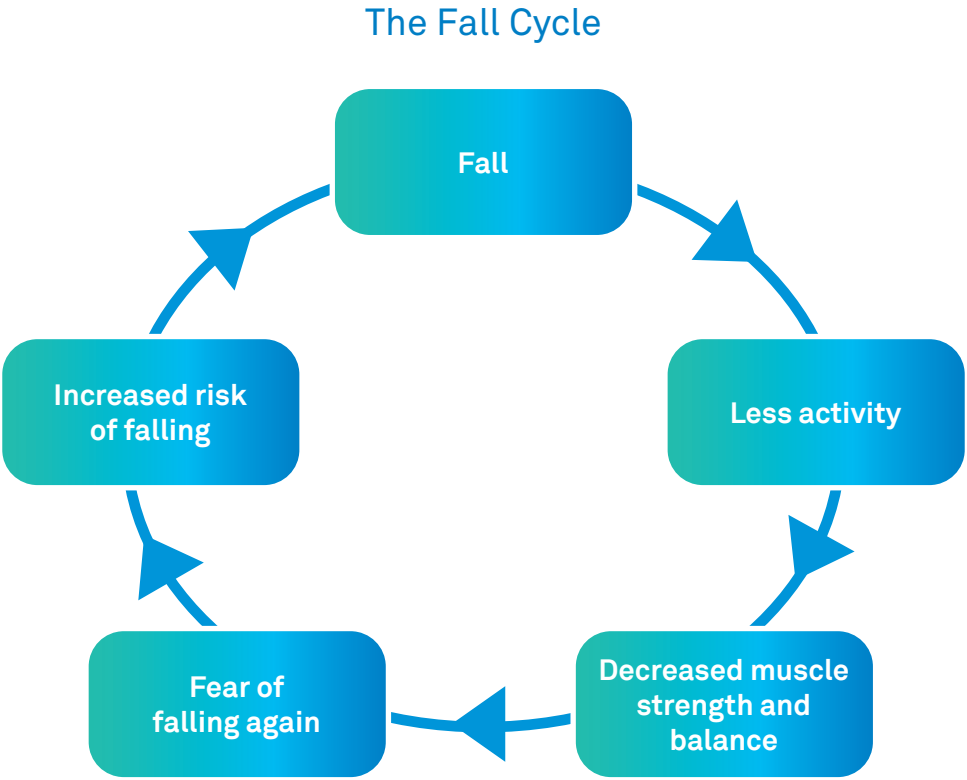


Good bone health is important!

- Osteoporosis (weak bones) is a condition that increases your risk of falling and breaking a bone
- Your Doctor may give you medication to help protect your bones
- It is important to ask your Doctor or Pharmacist if you are currently taking, or need to take medication osteoporosis
- Exercise and keeping active keeps your bones and muscles strong and prevent falls

Question 10: Are you worried about falling?

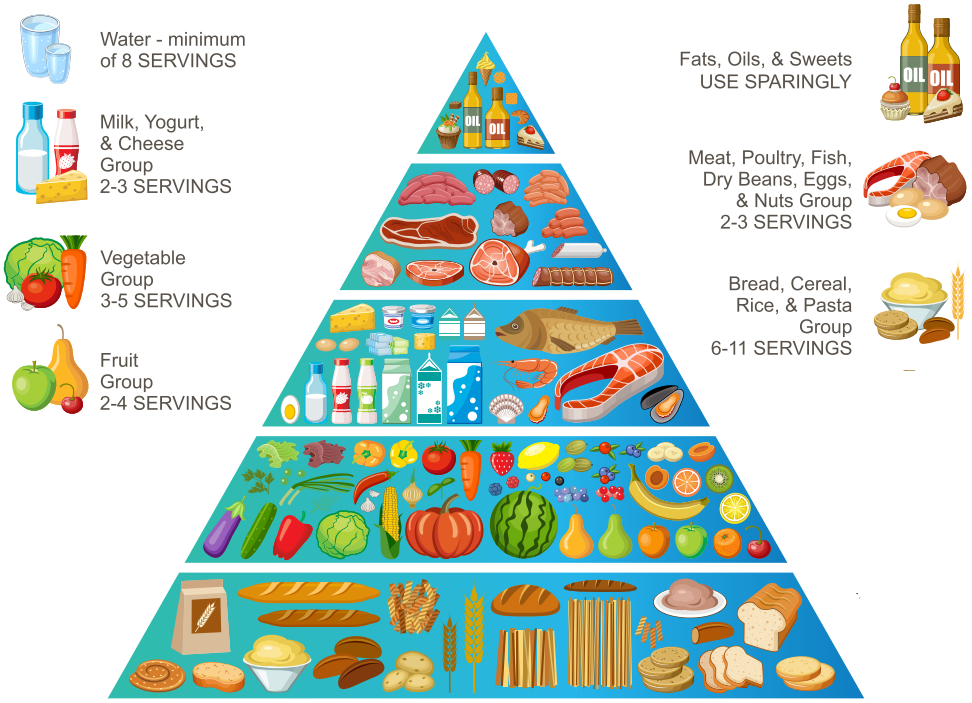
- It is normal to be worried about falling, particularly if you are unsteady on your feet or have fallen in the past
- The Fall Cycle (below) shows how the experience of falling gives rise to fear, stopping you from doing certain activities. The resulting inactivity places you at greater risk of falling
- Speak to your Doctor, Physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist if you are worried about falling. It is important you receive help building your confidence, to break this cycle



Question 11: Are you eating and drinking well?

- Not eating and drinking enough is linked to an increased risk of falling
- If you have lost weight or have a poor appetite, seek advice. Talk to your GP or Public Health Nurse, who may refer you to a Dietitian
- Make sure you eat a well-balanced diet to improve your balance and help you stay on your feet
- Follow the Food Pyramid for a well-balanced diet

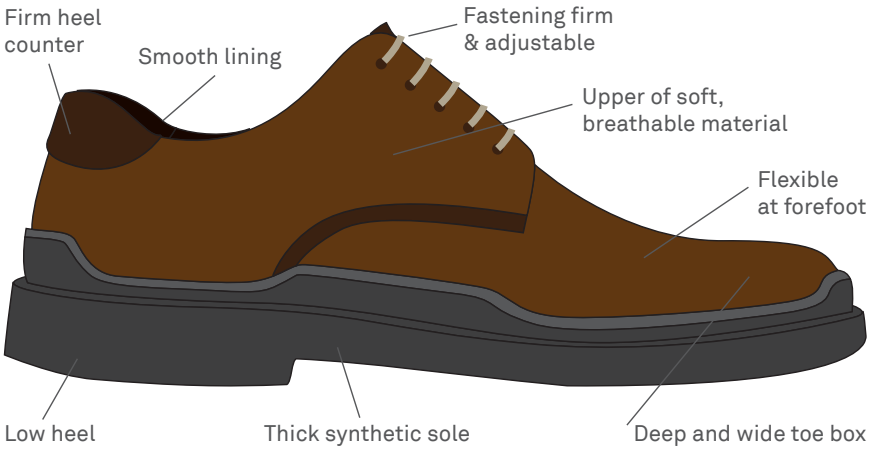
The Food Pyramid



Question 12: Are you wearing the correct footwear?

- Wear comfortable, well-fitting, flat shoes
- Avoid slip on shoes
- Make sure your laces are tied properly. If you have difficulty tying your laces, buy shoes with Velcro straps or elastic shoelaces
- Buy slippers that have proper backs on them, rather than slip-ons
- Change your slippers when they are worn out

The Ideal Shoe



Question 13: Do you have a pendant alarm?

A pendant alarm is worn around your neck or wrist and can be used to call for help if you fall.



- Always wear a pendant alarm if you are a falls risk

- If you are worried that you will not remember to use the alarm if you fall, a falls sensor should be used instead. This will call for help automatically if you fall

- If you are over 65 years of age, contact your Public Health Nurse or Occupational Therapist.

They can give you information on grants that may be available to help with the cost of your alarm. Further information is available on the following websites:

sas.pobal.ie
www.pobal.ie
www.ageaction.ie
www.citizensinformation.ie

- If you are under 65, you will need to pay for the pendant alarm. The following companies can help:

www.tunstallemergencyresponse.ie
www.lifeline24.ie
www.taskltd.com
www.independentlivingireland.ie

Question 14: Is your home environment safe?



- Falls are often caused by dangers that are easy to fix
- The following Home Safety Checklist will help you to identify potential dangers in your home and provide tips on how to fix them
- Conduct a home walk-through with your checklist to determine if your home is safe for you
- This list is not exhaustive and does not include every possible danger. There may be other risks to consider in your own home

Home Safety Checklist



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Driveway / Garden:

Look at the outdoor areas of your home

Q1: If there is a patio, pavement or decking? Is it level? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Make sure your pavement is in good condition.

Q2: Have all trip hazards, such as clutter and overgrown bushes, been removed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Ask friends / family to help remove clutter overgrown bushes.

Q3: If you have doormat, does it have a non-slip backing with no upturned corners? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Ensure doormats are secure.

Q4: Do you have outdoor railings / handle bars? Are they securely fastened? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Arrange for these to be fixed or replaced.

Q5: Does your driveway have a slope or incline? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Ask for assistance when walking on the driveway or ask a handyman to install a handrail.

Entrance and Access:

Look at the front and back access to your house

Q1: Are any steps at the front or back door broken or uneven? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Ask a family member or handyman to fix loose or uneven steps.

Q2: Is there a large threshold or steps at the door of your house? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Ask a handyman to put in a handrail .

Q3: Is there enough lighting at the front and back doors? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Ask an electrician to fit an outdoor sensory light.

Stairs and Hallway:

Look at the steps and stairs that you use both inside and outside your house

Q1: Are there clothes, shoes, books, or items on the stairs? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Remove unnecessary objects from the stairs. Keep the steps clear.

Q2: Is there adequate lighting on your steps and stairs? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Make sure all bulbs are working in the hall, on the stairs and on the landing. Set up a lamp in a safe place to light the stairway.

Q3: Do you have only one light switch for your stairs (only at the top or at the bottom of the stairs)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Plug in a night light. Ask an electrician put in a light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs.

Q4: Is the carpet on the steps loose or torn? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Make sure the carpet is firmly attached to every step, or remove the carpet.

Q5: Are the handrails loose or broken? Or is there a handrail on only one side of the stairs? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Fix loose handrails or put in a new rail. Make sure handrails are on both sides of the stairs and are the same length as the stairs.

Q6: Do you have a mat on the floor on your hallway? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Remove any mats or rugs from the floor.

Living / Sitting room:

Look at your main living space

Q1: Is there a clear pathway through the room? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Ask a friend or family member to move any obstacles or furniture that is in your way.

Q2: Is there enough lighting? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Replace the bulbs or install an extra lamp.

Q3: Have you got a comfortable and stable chair? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Make sure your chair is comfortable and that you can stand up easily.

Q4: Is the carpet / flooring in good condition (for example no holes, frayed or turned up edges, holes, bubbles or broken boards)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Fix or replace any damaged flooring.

Kitchen:

Look at your kitchen and eating area

Q1: Are the items you use most often on high shelves? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Keep things you use most often on the lower shelves or on the counter top. Reorganise your cabinets to make sure you don't have to stand on a stool to reach what you need.

Q2: Are items you use often on very low shelves? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Keep things you use often on shelves that are within easy reach.

Q3: Do you have difficulty carrying items around your kitchen while walking? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Move your kitchen table closer to your worktop. Ask your Public Health Nurse / Occupational therapist about a 'caddy' or 'kitchen trolley' to help carry items safely around the house.

Bathroom:

Look at all toilets & bathrooms

Q1: Is the bath or shower floor slippery? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Put a non-slip rubber mat on the floor of the bath or shower.

Q2: Do you need support when you get in and out of the bath or shower? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Install grab rails.

Q3: Do you have difficulty sitting in the bath? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Ask your Occupational Therapist about equipment that might help, such as a bath board.

Q4: Do you have difficulty managing to sit or stand from the toilet? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Ask your Occupational Therapist about equipment that might help, such as a raised seat or grab-rails.

Q5: Do you have any loose mats on your bathroom floor? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Recommendation: Remove the mats or stick them to the floor with double-sided tape.

Bedrooms:

Look at all toilets & bathrooms

Q1: Is your bedside light hard to reach? ☐ Yes
Recommendation: Put the light beside the bed. ☐ No

Q2: Is the path from your bed to the bathroom dark? ☐ Yes
Recommendation: Turn on your bedside light before you start walking, or install a night-light. ☐ No

Q3: Is there a wall socket near your bedside locker? ☐ Yes
Recommendation: Ask an electrician to install a plug socket so that you can have a bedside light. It is also useful to keep a phone near your bed. ☐ No

Q4: Do you keep slippers / shoes near your bedside? ☐ Yes
Recommendation: Keep shoes nearby to avoid walking barefoot. ☐ No

Q5: Is there any clutter in your room? ☐ Yes
Recommendation: Remove or minimise any clutter. ☐ No

Floors:

Look at all of the floors in your home

Q1: Do you have rugs, mats, or throws on your floor? ☐ Yes
Recommendation: Remove the mats or stick them to the floor with double-sided tape. ☐ No

Q2: If you use a mobility aid (for example a walking-stick or rollator), can you move it easily between rooms? ☐ Yes
Recommendation: Remove the door saddles or put in different flooring. ☐ No

Q3: Are there boxes, books, clothes or other items on the floor? ☐ Yes
Recommendation: Pick up items that are on the floor. ☐ No

Q4: Are there loose wires on the floor, such as telephone wires or extension leads? ☐ Yes
Recommendation: Fix loose wires / cords to the wall. ☐ No

Home Safety Action Plan

What else can you do to reduce the risk of falling?

Mobility Aids



- Your Physiotherapist may recommend the use of a walking stick, zimmer-frame or other mobility aid to help improve your balance and safety when walking.
- Your Physiotherapist will show you how to use your aid and make sure that you are using it safely.
- It is important to keep your aid in good condition. Check the ferrules (the rubber stoppers on the bottom of your walking frame, stick etc.) and wheels; make sure they are not cracked or worn. Also check the brakes and make sure they are in good working order.
- If you notice damage, arrange a repair, purchase a new aid or report the issue to your Physiotherapist who may be able to replace it.
- If you are given an aid by your therapist, it is important to continue using it until otherwise advised.

Daily Living Aids



- Your Occupational Therapist may recommend various aids to help improve your balance and safety when carrying out your daily activities. This may include a toilet frame or kitchen trolley for carrying items.
- Your Occupational Therapist will show you how to use the aids and make sure you are using them safely.
- It is important to keep your aids in good condition. Check them regularly for cracks, wear-and-tear or other issues.
- If you notice damage, arrange a repair, purchase a new aid or report the issue to your Occupational Therapist who may be able to replace it.
- If you are given an aid by your therapist, it is important to continue using it until otherwise advised.

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Clothing

- Be aware of clothes that are too long, for example dressing gowns, skirts or trousers. These can cause you to trip.
- Bed covers that trail on the ground (for example valence sheets or long quilts) can also be a major trip hazard. Ensure these are tucked in securely.

Pets

- Be aware of any pets in the home as they may get under your feet. If you are worried about this, perhaps keep your pet outside or enclosed in one room of the house when you are moving around.

Top Tips to help reduce your risk of falling

- Ask for a falls assessment if you have recently had a fall or feel unsteady on your feet.
- Have your medication reviewed regularly by your Doctor. You can also speak to your Pharmacist about any concerns.
- Have your eyesight/hearing checked regularly.
- Eat well to remain healthy and keep your bones and muscles strong. Ask for a referral to a Dietician if needed.
- Drink at least 6 to 8 cups of fluid every day, more during hot weather or exercise.
- Keep active and exercise every day.
- Take care of your feet. Wear well-fitting shoes and slippers.
- Use the toilet regularly, to prevent you from needing to rush later.
- Use any mobility and daily living aids advised by your Physiotherapist and Occupational Therapist.
- Use a pendant alarm. This will give you peace of mind and allow you to call for help if you have a fall.
- Ensure your home is safe by using the Home Safety Checklist included in this booklet. Review this regularly.

How to get up from a fall

It is important to know how to get up safely from a fall.
Here are two examples of how to do this.

Using your knees

1 Turn onto your back



2 Roll onto your side



3 Push onto your hands



4 Push up onto your hands and knees



5 Kneel, using stable furniture to steady yourself



6 Place your strongest leg forward



7 Stand up



8 Turn slowly



9 Sit down. Rest and tell someone you have fallen



Using your arms

1. Turn onto your back



2. Roll onto your side



3. Push onto your hands



4. Prop with both arms behind



5. Use a cushion (or other low sturdy object) as a low seat



6. Lift bottom back onto cushion



7. Push as far back as possible



8. Lift bottom back onto chair



9. Sit down. Rest and tell someone you have fallen



Follow these steps if you are not able to get up after falling

1. Press your pendant alarm
2. Try and get into a comfortable position
3. Keep warm
4. Keep moving your arms and legs if you can
5. If you need to use the toilet:
   - Use a paper towel to soak up fluid
   - Move away from the wet area if you can

Useful information

Healthcare / Equipment Suppliers

Name	Website	Telephone
Homecare Medical Supplies	homecaremedicalsupplies.ie	(042) 932 5000
Murrays Equipment Ireland	murrays.ie	(01) 855 5733
Beechfield Healthcare	beechfieldhealthcare.ie	(057) 8682304
Ability Matters	abilitymatters.co.uk	(01) 2891999
Phelan's Pharmacy	phelans.ie	(01) 2122662

DIY Support

Age Action Care & Repair service	ageaction.ie	(01) 4756989 Dublin (021) 2067399 Cork (091) 527831 Galway

Home Adaptations / Alterations

Contact your local County Council for information on grants available to help with this.

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