

Falls prevention guide



Helping you or your loved one stay safe at home



Who is at risk?



It's a disturbing fact that falls-related hospital admissions, among patients over 65, reach nearly a quarter of a million a year in England. As we age, our mobility is often affected and this makes the risk of falling that much greater.

When it comes to you or your loved ones, nothing is more important than ensuring everyone's safety, good health and happiness. Yet the risk of falling can be severely underestimated by both the individual and their family.

With some careful thought and preparation, a number of preventative measures can be put in place to ensure you or your loved ones remain safe and independent at home.

References:

¹ NHS Falls Prevention www.nhs.uk/conditions/falls/

² NCBI www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3468115/

³ Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (2022), Fingertips Public Health Profiles <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/falls#page/4/>

⁴ Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 11 April 2023, ONS website, dataset, Deaths registered summary statistics, England and Wales, 2022 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/deathregistrationsummarystatisticsenglandandwales/2022>

⁵ Age UK report "Later Life in the United Kingdom 2019" https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/later_life_uk_factsheet.pdf



How can falls be prevented?

There are three key areas to focus on that will help reduce the risk of having a fall:

- 1.** When people are living with frailty they are more likely to fall. But it is possible to become more resilient through the right exercise and diet, and to move out of frailty altogether.
- 2.** Between 30%-50% of falls are due to environmental causes, such as poor lighting and slippery floors, and are therefore preventable with improvements around the home.
- 3.** Worrying about falling can lead to a decline in physical activity, which can have a detrimental effect on maintaining strength and balance.

This vicious circle can be broken by addressing the concern of falling with solutions that can help prevent and detect falls, such as fall alarms and preventative solutions.

There are several things you can do to avoid falls, and maintain the confidence and reassurance to carry on living a healthy and happy life.

1 Fall-proofing the home environment



223,101

falls-related emergency hospital admissions in England among patients aged 65 and older³

Often, potential hazards in the home are easily overlooked. Some simple checks could help fall-proof your surroundings.

- ✓ Is the lighting good, especially on the stairs?
- ✓ Is there a night light in the bedroom or a torch by the bed in case there is a need to get up in the night?
- ✓ Are floors clear of trailing wires, wrinkled or fraying carpets, or any other trip hazards?
- ✓ Are stairs and steps free of clutter?
- ✓ Are there handrails on both sides of the stairs?
- ✓ Is there a non-slip mat and a fitted handrail in the bath?
- ✓ Are there non-slip mats under rugs?
- ✓ Do any pets wear collars with bells on to avoid them being a trip hazard?
- ✓ Is a step ladder needed to reach high places? You should always ask for help when using a ladder and never stand on a chair.



7,508

people aged 65+ died from having a fall in 2022 equating to 20 people every day⁴

2 Stay active; improve strength and balance

Balance problems and/or muscle weakness also cause falls. It is best to remain as active as possible and improve strength through regular exercise - even small amounts of movement can help.

By building muscle strength in the legs, arms, back, shoulders and chest, you or your older relative can improve posture, co-ordination and balance, hence reducing the risk of falling.

Great ways to keep moving:

- Use the stairs frequently
- Slowly and repeatedly rise to a standing position from a chair
- Walk, play badminton, dance or do yoga
- Take part in evidence-based falls prevention activities such as strength and balance classes, Otago and Tai Chi

Age UK have some great tips at:

www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/exercise

3 Maintain eyecare and medicines



up to
70%
of people who have recently fallen and up to 40% of those who have not reported a recent fall have a fear of falling⁵

Poor eyesight can mean you or your loved one is more likely to trip or lose balance. Even wearing glasses, bifocal or varifocal lenses can make objects and surfaces appear closer than they really are.

If this is a problem it is best to get advice from an optician. Also make sure that you or your loved one has their eyes checked and prescription reviewed as often as the optician advises, and at least every two years.

Certain medication, low blood pressure or poorly controlled diabetes can make an individual feel faint or dizzy. Make sure to let a GP or pharmacist know if you or your loved one ever feels like this - the dose may need to be reviewed

or alternative medicines considered.

Alcohol can interact with some medicines and can affect balance too.

4 Looking after your feet



Foot problems can stop you or your loved one getting out-and-about, affecting balance and increasing the risk of falling.

Make sure that any problems are reported to a GP or practice nurse, such as foot pain or decreased sensation in the feet.

Sufferers of arthritis may find that trainers or well-cushioned shoes are more comfortable than ordinary shoes and offer better support. But check that soles aren't too thick as the wearer could feel unsteady if they can't feel the floor beneath them.

Make sure to:

- Wear shoes that fit well. High-sided shoes with low heels and thin soles with a strong grip are a good choice
- Avoid wearing sandals and high-heeled shoes
- Wear slippers with a good grip and that fasten up. Loose or worn-out slippers may cause the wearer to trip
- Wear trousers/skirts that don't trail on the ground
- Always wear shoes or slippers. Make sure to avoid walking indoors in bare feet, socks or tights to avoid slips

5 The fear of falling

Often, simply the fear of falling can become a major worry for you or your loved one. Anxiety may stem from having had a fall in the past, or after a period of illness which could leave you feeling weak and a bit unsure of yourself.



30-50%

of falls are due to environmental causes e.g. poor lighting, slippery floors and uneven surfaces⁶

This can result in a loss of confidence in carrying out daily tasks and activities and becoming reluctant to go out on your own. Normal levels of physical activity may also be reduced.

Whilst worrying about falling isn't unusual, it can have a lasting effect on an individual, making them anxious, isolated or depressed. Fears about losing their independence can also make them reluctant to seek help.

Ensure you or your loved one remain as physically active as possible and seek reassurance to help overcome any fears. Installing a personal alarm in the home, for instance, can provide peace of mind to the individual and their friends and relatives. It means that in the event of a fall, help will be on hand at any time of the day or night.

A personal alarm is worn like a necklace or a watch, and at the press of a button, will trigger an alert to a monitoring team if the wearer has fallen.

Being able to signal in this way for help quickly doesn't only provide you with the confidence to enjoy life to its fullest; it can also stop an accident turning into an emergency, especially in winter when homes and gardens can become very cold.

About Taking Care



Taking Care has been providing personal alarm services for more than 30 years and supported over 1/4 million people and their families with personal alarms.

We have the alarm to fit you and your lifestyle

We are part of AXA Health, a leading UK private healthcare company with over 75 years' experience in providing healthcare products and services. We are also the trusted provider of the Age Co Personal Alarm Service.

Each year we handle over 25,000 emergency alarm calls from older and vulnerable people. Customers love the peace of mind our service offers - 99% of them say they like the security of knowing someone's there at the press of a button.



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For further advice on how to keep you or your loved one safe and independent at home or out-and-about get in touch today - we are here to help.

 **0800 028 1865**

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Age Co Personal Alarms are provided by Taking Care, part of AXA Health