



Falls Prevention



Staying Active -
To Stay Independent



RUSHMOOR
BOROUGH COUNCIL



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Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet. We hope you will find it useful. It could help to prevent an injury to yourself and possibly a spell in hospital.

This leaflet has been put together by the Rushmoor Strategic Partnership (RSP) who are working with other agencies to inform people how many **FALLS CAN BE PREVENTED**. The RSP wishes to encourage older people to lead safe and independent lives in their own homes.

The risk of having a fall increases with age. This booklet is designed for older people, their relatives and carers. Its purpose is to increase awareness of falls and through simple tips encourage people to help to reduce the risks of falls.

Why should I stay active?

Keeping fit and healthy will help you to stay mobile and independent. It is never too late to take up some form of activity to improve your suppleness and strength. Even adding a short walk three or four times a week to your routine will make a big difference. If you don't get much exercise at present, it is a good idea to start gently. Consult your GP if you have any concerns about your health.

A fall can often lead to fear and reduced confidence. In an effort to avoid further falls people often restrict their activity. The less active a person is, the greater the chance of another fall, as it leads to stiff joints, weak muscles and poor balance. Even healthy older people lose strength and periods of immobility can leave people too weak to carry out everyday tasks.

The good news is **IT'S NEVER TOO LATE** to increase muscle strength through activity.

A recent study has shown that gently exercising for a total of three hours a week, improves the strength of thigh muscles by around 25% in only 12 weeks.

Here are a few important points to remember:

- Set realistic and achievable targets. The activity doesn't have to be strenuous; a walk to the shops is a good start.
- Build up gradually and listen to your body.
- Don't exercise if you are tired, unwell or have just eaten.
- Remember to breathe properly. Don't hold your breath while doing any movement.
- It is not unusual to feel a bit stiff and tired after the first few periods of exercise. However, if this continues, consult your GP.

- If you feel any dizziness, nausea, or cold sweats stop exercising immediately and consult your GP.



Eating for Health

Eating a balanced diet is important to supply the body with energy, essential nutrients and fibres.

An adequate intake of calcium and vitamin D is important to maintain bone health particularly as you grow older.

Calcium

Aim for 3 portions of high calcium foods each day and try to choose lower fat alternatives where possible.

Good calcium foods include:

- Milk all types (portion = one small glass)
- Cheese all kinds (portion = 1 ½oz or 40 grams)
- Milk based foods (portion = one carton or bowl)

e.g. Yoghurt, custard, milk pudding



Vitamin D

Vitamin D aids the absorption of calcium into bones.

The main source of vitamin D is the action of sunlight on skin. Low levels of vitamin D are common in older people who are housebound.

How to increase vitamin D levels

- Try to go outside for half an hour each day between April and September. Remember that some skin needs to be exposed!
- Eat high vitamin D foods e.g. liver, oily fish, (herrings, kippers, mackerel, sardines, tuna, salmon, and trout) breakfast cereals, margarine, egg (yolk) - remember to cook well.



Note: Housebound people should take a calcium and vitamin D supplement – seek advice from your GP.

Remember for all round good health include:

- Five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.
- Plenty of fluid - drink six - eight cups per day
e.g. water, cordial and herbal tea.



Managing your Medicines

Some medicines have side-effects which can make you more likely to fall. By taking a few simple precautions you can remove or reduce this risk.

You must check on medications you buy over the counter as well as the medicines your GP has prescribed for you. Even if these are herbal remedies.

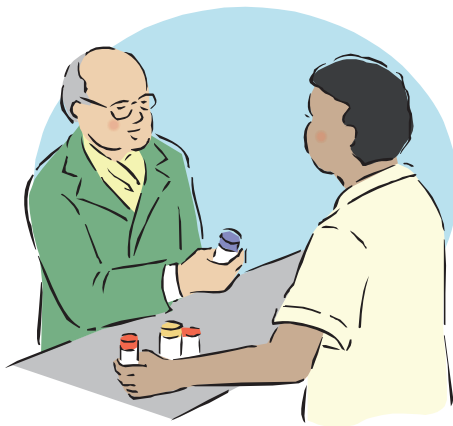
When you collect your medication make sure you understand the instructions on the label. If you are in any doubt, ask your pharmacist to explain.



Special groups of medicines to watch out for:

Some of the medicines used for lowering blood pressure or for heart conditions may cause dizziness so take care when sitting or standing up, do this slowly and carefully. Water tablets (Diuretics) help your body to get rid of excess water so will make you want to go to the toilet more frequently. Take care not to rush.

Medicines to help you sleep can sometimes make you feel a little drowsy or confused in the morning. If this happens take time to get your balance especially if you have to get up during the night and ensure you tell your GP as soon as possible.



General Tips

- Only take medicines prescribed for you!
- Make sure you know how and when to take each medicine and that it is stored correctly.
- Be sure to finish each course of treatment.
- If you take four or more medicines, ask your GP or pharmacist to check them for you regularly.
- Some caps on bottles are made hard to open to protect children. If you find you cannot use these ask your pharmacist to change the top to an ordinary screw cap.
- Make sure you get a flu jab every winter, as flu can make you unsteady on your feet.
- Make sure you obtain your 'Message in a Bottle' free from health centres and chemists. Fill in the enclosed emergency medical information form and keep it in the fridge.



Checking Your Eyesight

Your vision plays an important role in your sense of balance and movement. It is a good idea to have your eyes checked regularly – at least every two years. Eye tests are free if you are aged 60 or over. If you are on a low income you may also get help with the cost of glasses. Remember that reading glasses, bifocal or varifocal lenses can make objects and surfaces appear closer than they really are. This could cause you to trip or lose your balance. If you think this could be a problem, please ask your optician for advice.



Good Feet - Good Shoes

By paying attention to your feet and shoes you can help reduce the risk of a fall. The more active you are the better your balance is likely to be. In order to keep your joints mobile and muscles strong, you need to be able to walk confidently and comfortably.

Good Feet

Looking after your feet and having regular foot-care check-ups are very important aspects of personal care. Foot problems can have a major affect on mobility, balance and stability. If you have a painful foot problem arrange to see a State Registered Chiropodist (SRCh). You may be eligible for NHS treatment. Ask your GP or healthcare professional for advice. If you need to consult a private chiropodist, always look for the initials 'SRCh' after their name. Follow the advice they give you to keep your feet fit and pain free.

Good Shoes

Invest in a good pair of shoes for everyday wear – even if you spend much of your time indoors. Here are some tips for choosing footwear.

- Check you have the right shoe size. Cramped feet don't allow you to walk naturally.
- Avoid wearing slippers which are loose and worn out or that don't have backs.
- Try to avoid backless shoes or sandals with a sling back as they make the ankle unstable.
- Laces or broad straps give the best support - if your feet swell, adjust the fastening during the day.
- Be wary of deeply ridged or smooth shiny soles -they could catch on uneven surfaces or send you sliding.
- Watch out for trailing hems of trousers and long nightdresses for example.



What to do if you have a fall

Try not to panic, falling is a shock to the system and having a clear idea of what to do can make it easier to deal with.

- Don't move if you feel pain.
- Don't panic or try to get up straight away.

Summon help

- Use your care alarm if you have one.
- Try to get to a telephone.
- Bang on the wall or floor, use a stick or shout.

Keep moving

- This helps to relieve pressure areas and stiffness.
- Keep your hands and feet moving to help

Keep warm

- Try to move to a carpeted area if you have fallen on a hard floor.
- Keep warm by using clothing, a cushion, a tablecloth or newspaper for example and cover your feet and legs first.

Getting up from the floor

If you are unhurt and feel able to get up follow these simple steps:

1. Turn over on to your hands and knees if you can.
2. Move along the floor by either crawling or pulling yourself until you get to a stable piece of furniture such as a chair, bed or stool.
3. Place your hands on the chair/bed/stool and put the foot of your stronger leg on the floor in front of you with your knees close to your tummy. You should be in a half kneeling position.



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4. Lean forwards, pushing with your hands and feet and bring your second foot up next to the first.



5. Take a moment to steady yourself should you feel dizzy. Keep your hands on the chair/bed/stool.



6. Slowly turn around and slide your bottom onto the chair/bed/stool.

7. Sit down and rest for before trying to stand up.

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Tell your GP

It is important to tell your GP or another health professional about your fall. Your medical records can be updated and if necessary you may be referred to a 'falls group' for an assessment. They will help you to be more aware of risks and how to minimise them.

Pendant Alarms

If you are worried about falling when you are alone at home consider getting a pendant alarm.

- Cover is provided 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- A unit is fitted to your existing telephone point.
- You are issued with a pendant alarm.
- When the pendant is pressed, the alarm calls the operator who will be able to talk to you anywhere in your home.
- The operator will contact someone you trust who has a key to your home, or the emergency services.
- If you live in Rushmoor and would like to find out about Lifeline Care Alarms call 01252 323796.



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