



# Preventing Falls At Home

## Did you know?

- Falls are common in older persons
- One in three people above the age of 65 years has fallen at least once in the past year
- Most falls take place at home
- A fall is likely to occur again if you have fallen before
- A fall can result in fractures and affect your ability to walk
- Some falls can result in death

### Steps can be taken to prevent falls.

This booklet shares with you some of the common causes of falls and how you can prevent them.



## What are the risk factors of falls?

### + Poor Vision

- Eye conditions like glaucoma and cataracts develop commonly in older persons.
- These conditions affect vision and increase your risk of falls.
- Wearing glasses with the wrong prescription can also raise one's risk of falling.

### What should you do?

- Check your eyes regularly.
- Clean your eyeglasses regularly to improve visibility.
- Keep your house well-lit.
- Use colour contrast for objects used frequently in the house e.g. light switches, grab bars or handrails.
- Use night lights at home, especially in the bedroom and bathroom.



### + Lack of exercise

- Not having enough exercise can cause muscle weakness and loss of bone mass.
- This makes the impact of a fall more serious.

#### What should you do?

- Exercise regularly to improve your strength and balance e.g. tai chi, lower limb strengthening and balance exercises.
- Discuss with your physiotherapist / doctor to formulate an exercise programme.
- Use appropriate walking aids as advised by your doctor / therapists.
- Eat a healthy diet and drink plenty of fluid.
- Find activities that you enjoy and can carry out without causing fatigue and discomfort.

### + Postural Hypotension

- Postural hypotension is caused by a sudden drop in blood pressure and happens when you move to a more vertical position, e.g. getting up from a sitting position.
- Common causes include certain medications, dehydration and medical conditions such as Parkinson's disease.

#### What should you do?

- Minimise sudden movement and avoid changing positions quickly.
- Avoid alcohol and inactivity.
- Drink plenty of water and stay well-hydrated.

Consult a doctor if you get frequent symptoms of postural hypotension.



### + Osteoporosis

- As we age, our bones become weaker and more brittle, leading to osteoporosis.
- Weak bones tend to break more easily with low impact trauma.

#### What should you do?

- Adopt an active lifestyle through regular exercise.
- Reduce your intake of alcohol.
- Eat a balanced diet high in calcium. Consume more dairy and soya bean products, sardines (with bones), and green leafy vegetables.
- Stop smoking.



### + Side effects of medications

- Some medications or combination of medications can cause giddiness or drowsiness.

#### What should you do?

- Keep a list of all the medications you are taking.
- Know the common side effects of your medications.
- Inform your doctor if giddiness occurs after you start a new medication.
- Avoid mixing medication with alcohol.
- Use only your own medications.
- Dispose medications that you no longer use or have expired.
- Review medications regularly with your doctor.

### + Ill-fitting clothes and footwear

- Ill-fitting clothes and footwear may result in tripping or falls.

#### What should you do?

- Avoid wearing clothes with wide open pockets that may catch onto door knobs and cause a fall.
- Make sure your pants and sleeping gowns are not too long.
- Wear shoes with non-slip soles and good support.
- Replace your shoes / soles when they are worn out.



## Falls at home can be prevented with simple measures.

### + General Home Safety

- Keep pathways free of clutter, remove loose rags / obstacles.
- Keep wire / cords secured, away from pathways.
- Keep your home well-lit.
- Place commonly-used items within easy reach at the chest / waist level.
- Ensure chair / bed provides good support and is of suitable height.
- Use a walking aid if you need one, do not hold onto flimsy furniture.
- You may wish to carry a small slingbag in the house, which contains daily essentials / emergency items. e.g. inhalers, eye glasses, hand phone.

## At home

### + Kitchen

- Keep commonly-used utensils within easy reach, or at waist level. Attempting to over-reach for an object in a high-up cabinet may cause falls.
- Use a sturdy step stool for items on higher shelves. A better option is to ask a family member for help.
- Keep heavy objects at the front of the shelves for easy retrieval.
- Place electrical appliances beside switches and keep cords out of the way.
- Keep floors dry and wipe up liquid, grease or food spills immediately.





## At home

### + Bathroom, bedroom and washroom

- Be EXTRA careful in the bathroom as floor tends to be wet.
- Keep path free of obstacles.
- Remove toiletries, detergents and pails that obstruct your way around the toilet.



- Choose a bed that is a suitable height.
- Sit at the edge of the bed and place both feet on the floor.
- You should be able to bend your knees at 90 degrees when you do so.



- Sleep on a firm mattress.
- To avoid falling at night, consider having a bedside commode and walking aid(s) nearby to assist with your toilet needs.



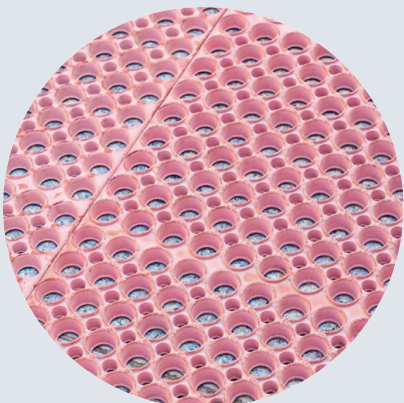
- Ensure the night-light or bedside lamp is within reach.



- Reduce fluid consumption 4 hours before you sleep.



- If you experience difficulty getting up from a low toilet seat, you may increase its height by using a raised toilet seat.



- To improve safety, you may install grab bars, place non-slip mats or apply non-slip floor treatment to the bathroom floor.



- Use a shower chair for better stability.
- Place toiletries where it can be easily accessed.



### + Staircases or steps

- Install sturdy handrails on both sides of the staircase.
- Use non-slip coloured strips to emphasise the edge of the steps.
- Remove clutter on the staircase.
- Keep it well-lit.

For further information on a home environment set-up, please consult your occupational therapist or doctor who will advise you.



## Overcoming fear

It is normal to feel afraid after a fall. Psychological trauma caused by a fall can result in total avoidance of daily activities.

- Stay as active as possible after a fall and return to your regular routines as soon as possible.
- A physiotherapist can plan a safe exercise programme for you that would improve your strength, balance and flexibility.
- Use a cane or walker that is prescribed by your physiotherapist and be sure they are fitted properly and can be used correctly.

You may also speak to your doctor on any concerns you have, or perform simple relaxation techniques to cope with anxiety.



# Getting up from a fall

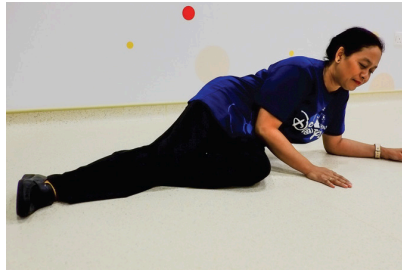
## What to do if you are alone?

A fall can be distressing especially if you are alone or if there is an injury. In the event of a fall, it is important to get up or get help as soon as possible.

Lying on the floor for too long can lead to more problems. If you are alone, follow these steps to get up safely.

- 1 Do not panic. Take deep breaths and remain where you are. Assess the situation; can you move your body, arms and legs? If you are in pain and unable to get up, call for help. Sit or lie down on the floor in a comfortable position until help comes.

- 2 If you are not in too much pain, roll to your uninjured side. Rest in this position until you feel strong enough to move.



- 3 Get onto all fours and crawl towards the nearest support, such as a sturdy piece of furniture.



- 4 Bend one knee and use your supporting foot and arms to brace yourself.



- 5 Push yourself into a half-standing position and slowly turn yourself around to sit down.



- 6 Sit or rest until you feel strong enough to get help. Tell a family member or friend that you have fallen and seek medical help if needed.





# How to help someone who has fallen?

If you are helping someone to get up from a fall, it is important to let the person try to get up on his / her own. You should only be a guide.

- 1 Calm the person down and let him / her continue to lie down while you check for injuries. Ask if he / she can move.

- 2 If there is no significant injury and pain, and if the person can move, roll him / her lightly onto the side and let them rest.



- 3 When the person feels strong enough to move, help him / her get onto all fours and move to a sturdy chair for support.



- 4 Guide the person to place both arms on the chair as a support and prop him / her into a kneeling position.



- 5 Guide him / her to use the arms and legs to push themselves up to a half-standing position.




- 6 Slowly guide the person to turn around and take a seat.



- 7 Guide the person to sit back into the seat. Remember not to lift the person as undetected injuries could worsen if you pull on him / her. Keep your back upright as you assist the injured person. Allow him / her to rest and check again for injuries. Seek medical help if necessary.



## What to do if you fall?

- Keep a mobile or cordless telephone with you at all times.
  - Keep emergency numbers in large print near each phone.
  - Set up quick dial numbers in your phone.
  - Carry an alarm device that will bring help in case you can't get up.
  - Leave a spare key with a family member who lives nearby so that they can come to your assistance.
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## When to call an ambulance?

- If the person is unconscious
- If there is severe pain
- If the person is unable to move
- If the fall involves injury to the head, neck, back, hip or thighs

Call 995 if any of these occur.

While waiting for help, do not move the person but keep him / her warm with a blanket or towel.

## Notes:

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The information in this brochure is meant for educational purposes and should not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. Please seek your doctor's advice before starting any treatment, or if you have any questions related to your health, physical fitness or medical condition.

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