

One Step Ahead

Preventing falls -
a guide for older people



Queensland Government

Queensland **Health**
Department of **Housing**

One Step Ahead

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Falls can result in serious injuries and long-term complications. They can also shake your confidence - stopping you from enjoying your valued independence. This booklet ("One Step Ahead. Preventing falls - a guide for older people") is designed to keep you on your feet.

One in every three people over the age of 65 may experience a fall within the next 12 months.

The good news is, falls can be prevented. This booklet can help you by highlighting some of the most common factors that cause falls and give you suggestions on how to reduce some of these potential risks.

At the back of this booklet there is a section listing places where you can obtain extra advice and receive answers to questions you may have about preventing falls.

Remember, falls can be prevented.

This booklet can help to keep you confident, mobile and independent.

BALANCE AND WALKING

Some of the following symptoms may affect your balance and manner of walking:

Physical conditions

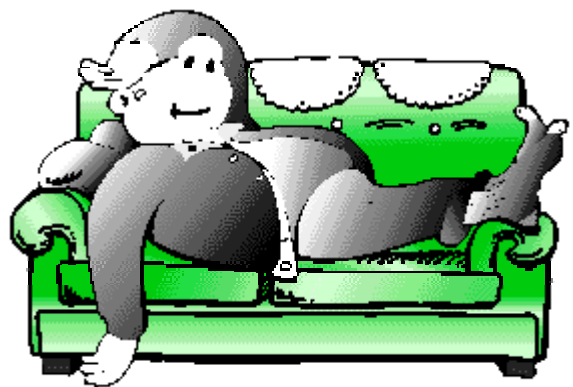
Do you experience/have:

- Joint stiffness
- Weak muscles/loss of strength
- Poor balance
- Dizziness
- Fainting
- Fatigue

If you have concerns with any of the above, make an appointment to see your doctor for a falls assessment.

Suggestions

- Get up slowly from sitting or lying position and pause before 'taking a step'
- Walk more slowly
- Stay seated if you are dizzy or sit down immediately
- Rest if you are tired
- It's important to participate in some form of gentle exercise which helps your strength, balance and flexibility



WALKING AIDS

Many older people do not need a walking aid, however it may provide you with the support and confidence to allow you to maintain an adequate level of independence and mobility.

If you do not use a walking aid, do you feel that you might benefit from trying one?

Suggestions

- The use of a walking aid needs to be recommended. Seek prescription of an appropriate aid from a health professional, eg. a physiotherapist
- Make sure your walking aid is at the correct height for you
- Do not use someone else's walking aid
- Maintaining your walking aid will ensure that it will serve you well. Pay particular attention to any loose parts, worn stoppers or bent frames
- Remove or reorganise furniture in your home so a walking aid can be used without hindrance



CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR

Long and loose clothing and inappropriate footwear can upset your balance and gait.

Suggestions

- Clothing should not trail around your ankles or have loose parts, which could flap and trip you. For example, dressing gowns that are too long should be taken up
- Footwear should fit securely and have a non-skid flexible sole with a broad low heel less than 1 inch (2.5cm) and be secured by laces or velcro
- Do not walk around wearing only socks or stockings as this could cause you to slip
- Also take care when you get up during the night that you do not trip over the bedspread - switch on your bed light first



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

**Do you regularly participate
in physical activity?**

Suggestions

- No matter what your age or physical limitation, regular gentle exercise or any enjoyable physical activity will benefit you, make you feel fitter and also reduce the risk of falls
- You should participate regularly in an appropriate form of physical activity such as walking, yoga, tai-chi, aqua aerobics or gentle exercise classes
- Choose exercises that improve your balance and muscle strength
- Make enquires about physical activities organised in your area eg. your local council, a health professional
- Always have a medical checkup before commencing any new physical activity



NUTRITION

Healthy eating can assist in maintaining
your health and independence

Suggestions

- Ensure that you eat three meals each day, and include nutritious snacks at morning and afternoon tea
- Eat plenty of vegetables (including legumes) and fruit
- Eat plenty of cereals, breads and pastas
- Include foods high in calcium. Try to have three to four serves of dairy foods daily eg. milk, cheese and yoghurt
- Drink more than one litre of water daily, particularly in hot weather
- Use added sugars in moderation
- For more nutrition information, contact Nutrition Australia, phone (07) 3876 2677 for free information



SIGHT AND HEARING

**A reduction in your ability to see and hear
may place you at risk of falling.**

Sight suggestions

- Have your vision tested regularly
- at least every two years
- Wear your prescribed glasses as recommended
eg. reading glasses – distance glasses
- Do not wear bifocals when walking up and down steps
- Have good lighting throughout your home especially in hallways, passageways and external walk ways - check the wattage of your light bulbs
- Turn on the lights before walking into a dark room
- Leave a light on at night to help you get around more safely (eg. night light), switch on your bed light or keep a torch handy



Hearing suggestions

- Have your doctor check your hearing at least once a year
- If you use a hearing aid make sure it is in good working order
- Keeping your ears free of wax helps to improve your hearing and balance

MEDICATION USAGE

Each person responds slightly differently to medication. Most medicines have side-effects and some can increase the likelihood of falling.

Have you and your doctor or Pharmacist recently reviewed all the medications you are taking including over-the-counter medications?

Suggestions

- Be aware of the purpose of your medications and report any side effects immediately to your doctor
- Do not take any additional medications, including those purchased over the counter, without consulting your doctor or pharmacist
- Any medication which has expired or been discontinued by your doctor should be returned to your pharmacist for disposal
- DO NOT take other people's medication
- Some medications should not be taken with alcohol under any circumstances. Ask your doctor about the effects of alcohol on the medication you take



ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

Suggestions

- Remember that alcohol can slow your reflexes and affect your balance
- Smoking contributes to circulatory and respiratory conditions which can, over time, increase the risk of falls

IN AND ABOUT THE HOME

There are a number of potential hazards in your home environment, which can contribute to an increased risk of falls.

The following checklist and suggestions can help you identify those hazards that may contribute to falls.

STAIRS/STEPS (INDOORS/OUTDOORS)

- Are your steps in need of repair? eg. loose or wobbly
- Are your steps slippery - particularly when wet?
- Do your steps have handrails?

Suggestions

- Repair any damaged steps immediately
- Make sure your stairs are not slippery. Apply anti-slip strips of a contrasting colour to the edge of each step
- Install handrails and use them when going up and down steps. Extend rails past top and bottom steps
- Keep stairs well-lit
- Stairs should be kept free of clutter at all times



FLOORS

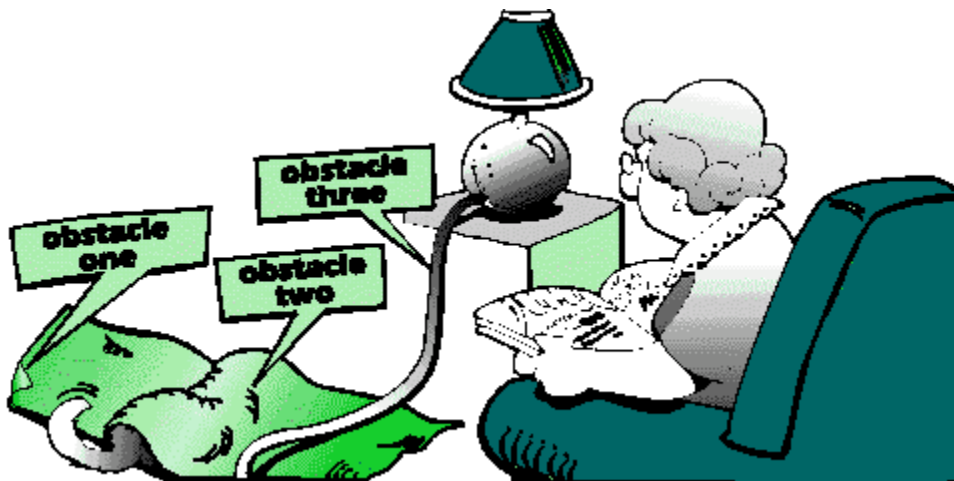
Are any of your floors slippery?

Are your floors free of obstacles?

Do you have any loose mats or scatter rugs?

Suggestions

- Keep all floors clean and dry. Clean up any spills immediately, especially fat, oil, ironing starch and insect spray
- Tack or tape down loose floor coverings or upturned edges
- Replace any badly-worn floor coverings
- Remove all obstacles that could cause you to trip (eg. electrical cords, foot stools)
- Watch out for pets under your feet



BATHROOM AND TOILET

Would you feel more confident if you had something to hold onto in the bathroom and/or toilet?

Are you able to get in and out of the bath and shower easily?

Are the floor surfaces in your bathroom/toilet slippery?

Suggestions

- Ask Home Assist Secure or your local Community Health Centre for advice on bathroom aids (eg. bath seats), grab rails and possible modifications which can be used to help reduce the risk of falling
- If you are unsteady on your feet, use a stool/ chair with non-skid tips as a seat while showering or bathing
- Apply non-slip strips on the floors of baths and showers
- Immediately wipe up water and talcum powder from your bathroom floor



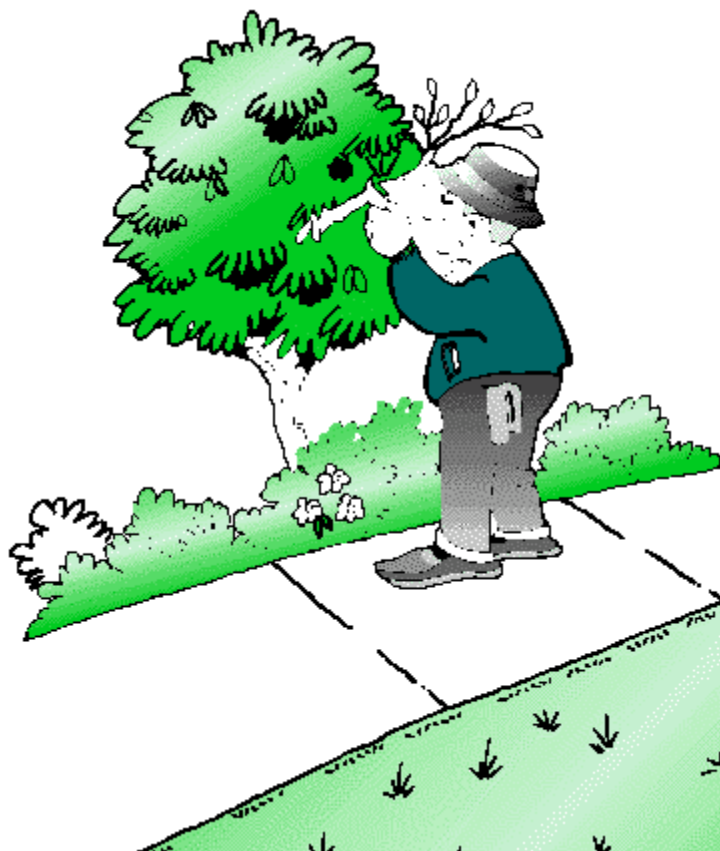
OUTSIDE PATHS

Are the paths around your house in good repair?

Do you keep outside paths clear
of obstacles/clutter?

Suggestions

- Undertake any maintenance required to make sure all paths are even and not slippery – remove leaves and moss
- Take particular care when walking on wet paths and grass
- Beware of uneven surfaces caused by tree roots
- Maintain clear access along pathways by trimming the branches of trees and shrubs
- Do not leave gardening tools, hoses or other obstacles lying around. Store away after use
- Report any damaged public paths and obstacles to your local council



STAYING INDEPENDENT

At 60 you may be wiser - but it may not be wise to do things the same way you did them at 20.

Rushing to do things, trying to do several things at the same time and doing things beyond your capabilities eg. climbing on chairs to reach up for high objects.

These actions can cause falls.

Suggestions

- Take your time and respect your limitations
- Never climb on chairs
- If you have a fear of falling, it is important to maintain your everyday activities. The less you do, the less able you become
- There is a saying: if you don't use it, you lose it
- **STAY ACTIVE**

There are many things you can do to promote and maintain your health and independence – why not start today?



WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

Seniors Inquiry Line

offers information about and referral to services groups and activities for older people throughout Queensland.

**1300 13 5500 (voice)
(07) 3250 1928 (TTY)**

Independent Living Centre (ILC)

provides free information and advice on equipment and resources for people with disabilities.

(07) 3397 1224

Telstra

offers services for people with hearing and speech difficulties.

**1800 068 424 (voice)
1800 808 091 (TTY)**

Disability Information and Awareness Line (DIAL)

offers information and referral services covering all disabilities and all services.

**1800 177 120 (voice)
(07) 3224 8021 (TTY)**

Aged Care Information Line

offers information on hostels, nursing homes and community care packages.

1800 500 853

Home Assist Secure

Contact your local service under H in the White Pages

**Please note 1300 - local call cost
1800- free call**