Falling is common once you are over the age of 65. Falls are the most common cause of both injury and hospital admission for people in this age group.

Most falls result in minor or no injury, however some can result in serious injury such as a broken hip. A loss of confidence and a fear of falling are common after a fall and can lead to restriction in activity. The most common place where falls occur is in a person’s own home environment.

**Falls can be prevented**

Falling once does not mean you will fall again, but it is the perfect time to prevent future falls. The first step is to identify any underlying issues which may have contributed to the fall, we call these “risk factors”. Falls rarely result from a single cause, and are usually the result from multiple small impairments coming together at the wrong time. Focussing on your individual risk factors is the most effective way to avoid future falls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk factor</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balance problems caused by inactivity, some neurological conditions such as poor circulation, Parkinson’s disease or previous stroke.</td>
<td>Exercise to improve your balance, strength and flexibility. Make time with a physiotherapist to carefully plan exercise that is suitable for your health and well being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some medications such as sleeping pills can slow reflexes and responses to changes in position.</td>
<td>Review your medication with your doctor and pharmacist to safely minimize sedations and total number of medications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive impairment occurs when there are problem with thought processes. It can include loss of higher reasoning, forgetfulness, learning disabilities, concentration difficulties, and clouding of thinking.</td>
<td>Assess and treat (if able) the cause of confusion. This may include reduction in medications, and treatment of medical conditions causing acute confusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incontinence or urgency leading to distraction and rushing to the toilet.</td>
<td>A continence nurse can assist you. Ask your G.P. for further information or referral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental hazards such as loose rugs or steps can cause slips and trips. Falls often occur when showering, going to the toilet or moving around the house, garden or neighbourhood.</td>
<td>An occupational therapist home review can help you identify actions to decrease risk of falls. Things to consider include: loose rugs, cords, slippery bathroom mats, clutter, inadequately lit rooms, uneven surfaces and floor levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor fitting footwear, shoes with poor support or slippery soles can all cause falls.</td>
<td>Wear shoes that are comfortable and fit well. Shoes should be wide enough in the toe area, have low or no heel, and have slip-resistant soles. Avoid walking in socks, slippers and thongs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory loss (Vision impairment) or problems with altered sensation (decreased feeling in the feet).</td>
<td>Have your vision checked regularly, especially for cataracts, avoid bifocal spectacles. Balance training will help if you have decreased feeling in your feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postural hypotension - dropping blood pressure when you stand up.</td>
<td>Have your blood pressure checked when you stand up, and talk to your G.P. about medications which might affect your blood pressure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What happens if you come to hospital

Your assessment will begin with a careful history and a check for serious injuries. Your medications will be reviewed, and an assessment of walking, balance, and acute problems which may have precipitated the fall will take place. You may undergo tests if needed including x-ray, ECG, blood and urine tests.

Other health professionals such as physiotherapist, occupation therapist, and specialist nurses may see you to assist your recovery and help prevent future falls. Your team will organise appropriate follow-up and recommendations to your G.P.

It is important to complete follow up and attend appointments as advised and to return to the hospital if there are any problems. Following up with your G.P. post your fall is very important as the G.P. plays a vital part in minimizing your fall “risk factors”.

What to do if you fall at home

• don’t panic – stay still for a few minutes and try to calm down
• decide whether you can get up yourself.

If you can get up by yourself

• if have one use your personal alarm
• roll over onto your stomach and try to get into a crawling position
• crawl to a stable piece of furniture, like a lounge chair
• try to get up onto your knees
• push up, using your arms and legs, still firmly holding onto the furniture
• sit down on the furniture.

If you can’t get up by yourself

• If have one use your personal alarm or 000 to seek medical assistance.
• Try to crawl or drag yourself to somewhere on carpet and find anything that can keep you warm, such as bedclothes, a towel or clothing while you wait for help.
• If you don’t have a personal alarm, use an object that you can bang to make a loud noise, like a walking stick against the wall, to alert a neighbour.
• If you know no one will hear you, keep warm and try to get up again later.

There are a range of useful organisations and resources available to assist you. It is important that you discuss any concerns you have regarding your falls risk with your G.P., family and/or carer.

Stay On Your Feet

13 HEALTH- 13 43 25 84
(get health advice over the phone from qualified staff).

Dietitians Association Australia
Provides information about food, health and wellbeing.
www.daa.asn.au or call 1800 812 942

Osteoporosis Queensland
Provides information about bone health.
www.osteoporosis.org.au or call 1800 242 141

My Aged Care and the National Disability Insurance Scheme provides free and confidential information on community aged care, disability and other support services.
www.myagedcare.gov.au
www.ndis.gov.au or call 1800 052 222

NPS MedicineWise – medicines line
www.nps.org.au or call 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424).

LifeTech Queensland
Provides solutions to everyday life activities
www.lifetec.org.au or call 1300 885 886

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