

# Up and about

Taking positive steps to avoid **trips** and **falls**



We are happy to consider requests  
for other languages or formats.  
Please contact 0131 314 5300 or email  
[nhs.healthscotland-alternativeformats@nhs.net](mailto:nhs.healthscotland-alternativeformats@nhs.net)

Published by NHS Health Scotland

1 South Gyle Crescent  
Edinburgh EH12 9EB

© NHS Health Scotland and Age Scotland 2014

ISBN: 978-1-84485-584-8

All rights reserved. Material contained in this publication may not be reproduced in whole or part without prior permission of NHS Health Scotland (or other copyright owners). While every effort is made to ensure that the information given here is accurate, no legal responsibility is accepted for any errors, omissions or misleading statements.

NHS Health Scotland is a WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Promotion and Public Health Development.

## Picture credits

© NHS Health Scotland, except for pages 6, 9, 12, 18, 21, 23, 25, 26, 28, 31, 32 and 42: © iStockphoto.com

# Contents

**Whatever your age,  
there are many  
things that you can  
do to reduce the  
risk of falling.**

How can I look  
after my health?

3

How can I  
keep active?

19

How can I move  
about safely?

29

What if I fall?

35

Where can I go  
for advice?

39

Healthcare  
professionals you  
might meet

43



**Looking after your eyes, hearing, feet, medication, bones and diet can help to reduce your risk of falling.**

# How can I look after my health?

Looking after your health can help to reduce your risk of falling and can mean that you don't injure yourself as badly if you do have a fall.

## Looking after your eyes

Your eyesight helps you to move around safely and stay steady on your feet. You may have worn glasses for years, but that doesn't mean the lenses in your glasses are right for you now.

Make the most of your free eye test every year and remember to tell your optician if you've had a fall. If you notice any changes in your vision, don't wait for your next eye test – go and see your optician as soon as you can.

### **RNIB Scotland**

The helpline offers information and advice to blind and partially-sighted people about sight loss and is open Monday to Friday 8.45 am–5.30 pm.

Telephone: **0303 123 9999**

**[www.rnib.org.uk/scotland](http://www.rnib.org.uk/scotland)**



**Remember to clean  
your glasses regularly,  
and to put them on if  
you get up in the night.**



Some glasses, for example, bifocals or varifocals can increase the risk of falling. As we get older we tend to look down more and, if we look through the reading part of the lens, we might not see the ground clearly. This is especially a problem when walking outdoors, down stairs or on uneven pavements or kerbs. There are different types of glasses that may be more suitable for you.

## Looking after your hearing

Hearing problems are more likely as you get older, but people often wait several years before talking to their GP about them. Problems with hearing can affect your balance. If you've noticed a change in your hearing, speak to your GP.



### Action on Hearing Loss

Action on Hearing Loss (the new name for RNID) is the largest charity for people who are deaf or have hearing problems. They give information and support on their free helpline and textphone service, open Monday to Friday 9 am–5 pm.

Telephone: **0808 808 0123**

Textphone: **0808 808 9000**

**[www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk)**



## Looking after your feet

It is important to take care of your feet, whatever your age. Problems like calluses, long toe nails, poor circulation or loss of feeling can make you unsteady on your feet, as well as causing pain and discomfort.

If you have painful feet, you may not feel like walking about as much. Being less active causes your muscles to weaken and this increases your chances of tripping or falling. Don't ignore the pain. If you are worried about your feet, contact your local NHS podiatry (foot health) department or your GP for advice.

Wearing shoes that fit you properly will help you to move around more safely and comfortably. Shoes and slippers should be comfortable and ideally have a fastening.



**You should replace your slippers regularly because when they stretch they can become loose.**



Walking around the house in just socks or bare feet can increase the chance of slipping and falling. It is a good idea to wear shoes in the house during the day because they give your feet more support than slippers.

If you wear insoles or splints and have not had these checked in a while, speak to your GP or the hospital department where you got them from to check that they are still right for you.



If you are looking for general advice on looking after your feet, you can access an NHS guide and video on **[www.lookafteryourfeet.info](http://www.lookafteryourfeet.info)**


You can also ask your local pharmacy (chemist) or your local NHS podiatry (foot health) department.

## Managing your medication

It is important to take medicines at the right time of day and in the dose shown in the prescription. However, certain medicines can make you feel faint, dizzy or drowsy. Let your GP or pharmacist know if you ever feel like this – they may want to change the dose you are taking or try a different medicine for you.

Check the instructions, even if you have been taking the medication for some time. Sometimes you may need to take medication with water, food or on an empty stomach so that it works properly. You should also ask your pharmacist for advice about whether you can drink alcohol with your medication – it can cause problems with some medicines.

Before taking any ‘over the counter’ medicines or supplements that you can buy without a prescription, it is important to check with your pharmacist, as these can also have an effect on other medication you are taking.



**If you take several different medicines, your GP should review them regularly, in case you no longer need them or the dose needs to be changed.**

## Healthy bones

Keeping your bones healthy is important, regardless of your age. If your bones are strong, there is less chance of you breaking a bone if you fall. As we get older, our bones become thinner. There are a number of things you can do to make your bones stronger.

Doing weight-bearing exercises (such as walking), eating a well-balanced diet rich in calcium, limiting how much alcohol you drink and stopping smoking can all help to look after your bones.

Good sources of calcium include:

- milk, cheese and other dairy foods
- green leafy vegetables, such as broccoli, cabbage and okra (but not spinach)
- soya beans and tofu, or soya drinks with added calcium
- nuts
- bread and anything made with fortified flour
- fish where you eat the bones, such as sardines and pilchards.

As well as calcium, we need vitamin D for healthy bones. We get most of our vitamin D from sunlight. If you can't get out and about easily, you might be given supplements. Speak to your GP to check that you are getting enough vitamin D.

Just keeping active reduces the risk of breaking bones for older people. This is probably because it improves muscle strength, balance and coordination – and this reduces the risk of falls.

Swimming is good for general health, but weight-bearing and strengthening exercises are better for bones.



**To keep your bones healthy, your day-to-day weight-bearing exercises will help you to stay strong.**



**Safe, appropriate exercise will help you manage if you have osteoporosis.**



# Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a condition that affects bones. Having osteoporosis means that your bones are more porous than healthy bones and this makes them more fragile.

1 in 2 women and 1 in 5 men over the age of 50 will break a bone because of low bone strength, mainly caused by osteoporosis. Younger people can also be affected by this disease.

Having osteoporosis does not automatically mean that your bones will break, but it does mean that you have a higher chance of breaking a bone if you have a bump or fall.

Broken bones caused by a fall are called 'fragility fractures'. Some medicines can reduce your risk of breaking more bones. If you have been prescribed medication for osteoporosis by your GP, it is important that you keep taking your prescription until you are told to stop.



## National Osteoporosis Society

The National Osteoporosis Society works to improve the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of osteoporosis. Their trained nurses can answer medical queries and give you information about osteoporosis. The helpline is open Monday to Friday 9 am–5 pm.

Telephone: **0845 450 0230**

**[www.nos.org.uk](http://www.nos.org.uk)**

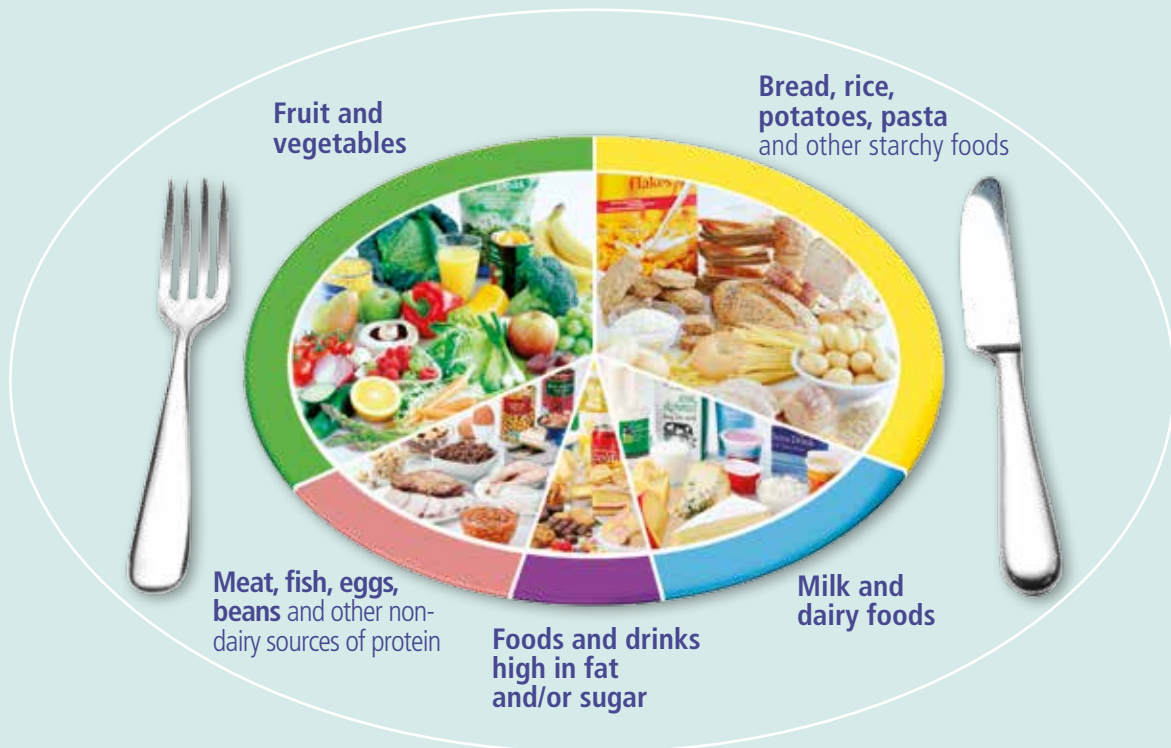


## Looking after your general health

Eating a healthy, balanced diet is a good way to keep yourself up and about.

Missing a meal can make you feel dizzy or faint (light-headed), making you more likely to fall. It is important to eat regular meals and make sure you drink enough water throughout the day.

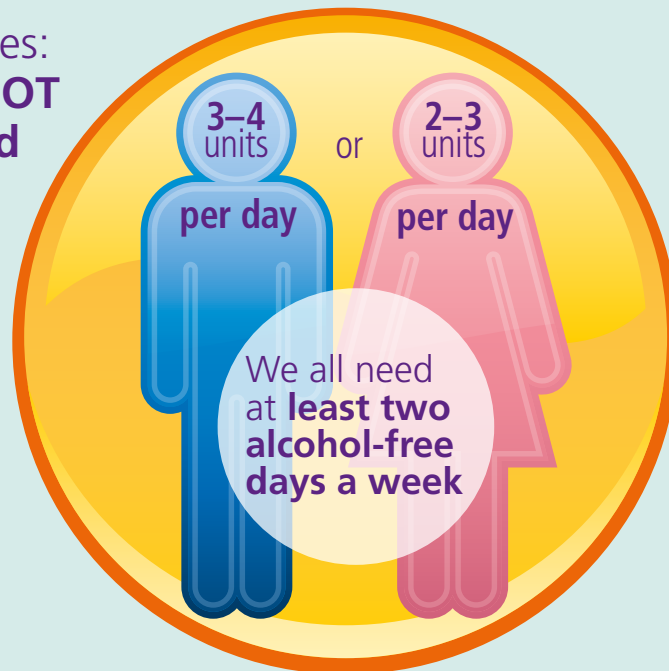
The 'eatwell plate' highlights the different types of food that make up our diet. It also shows the amounts of each food that we should eat to have a well-balanced and healthy diet.



It's a good idea to try to get this balance right every day, but you don't need to do it at every meal. And you might find it easier to get the balance right over a longer period of time – you could balance your diet out over a week instead of each day. Try to choose options that are lower in salt when you can.

Drinking too much alcohol or smoking has a damaging effect on bones. It is best to stay within healthy guidelines for drinking and to avoid smoking altogether. Drinking alcohol can also affect your balance, which may increase the risk of a trip or fall.

Drinking guidelines:  
**adults should NOT  
regularly exceed**



## Coping with the fear of falling

If you have already had a trip or fall, you may feel anxious about falling again and this can make you try to avoid moving about. Avoiding physical activity causes your muscles to weaken, and this increases your risk of falling.

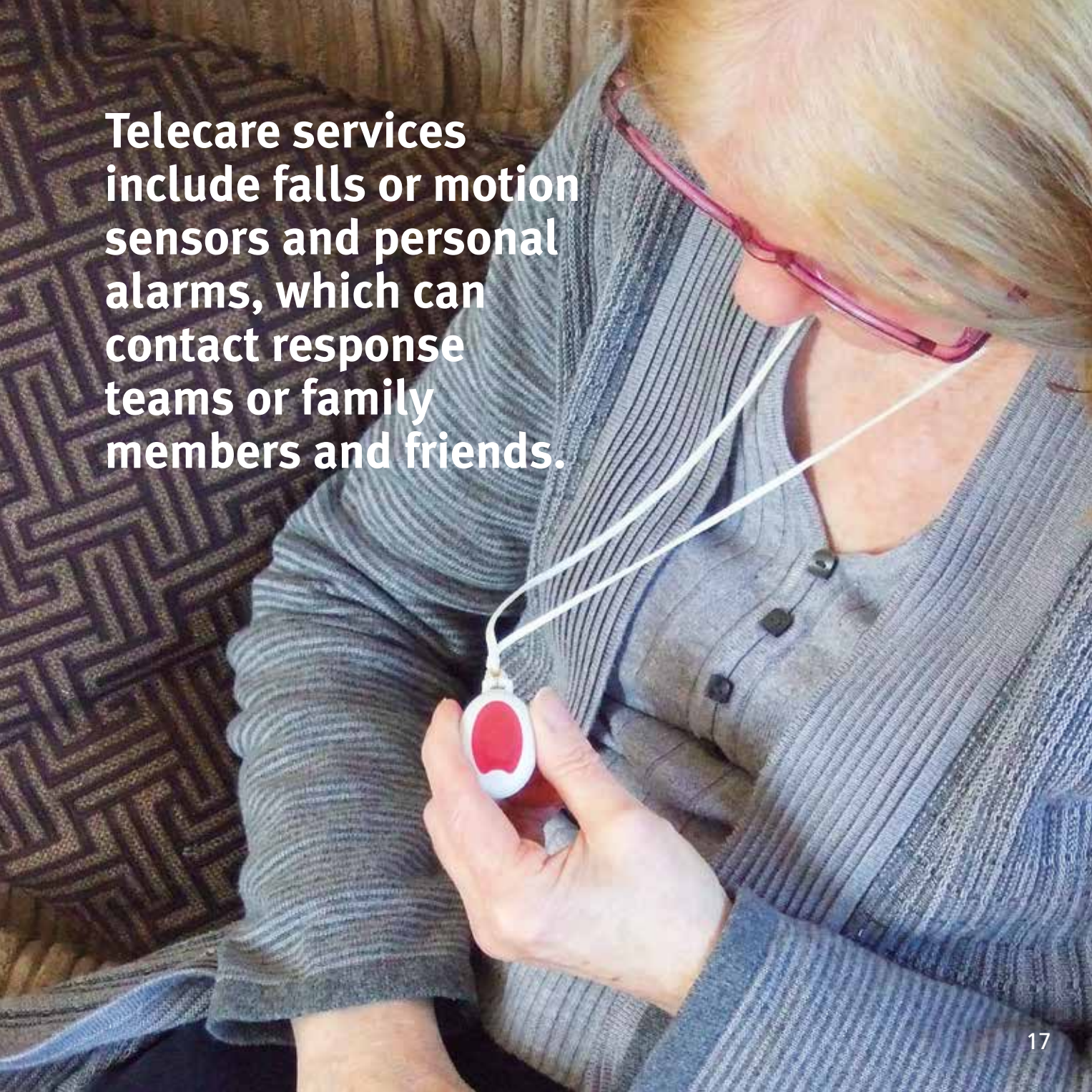
We all trip or fall sometimes, but fear of falling can become a serious worry.

Your GP or other health professional can arrange for a 'home and person' risk assessment which will help to find out why you are falling. This assessment can be used to make a personal plan to prevent you from falling again and includes strategies to help build your confidence.

Telecare services use technology to support people to live safely and independently in their own homes. Ask your GP or social worker whether telecare could help you.



**Telecare services include falls or motion sensors and personal alarms, which can contact response teams or family members and friends.**





**Being active has many benefits, even for people who have been inactive for years.**

# How can I keep active?

If you keep active as you get older you are likely to lead a more independent life. Whatever your age, it is important to be as active as you can.

Being active has many benefits, even for people who have been inactive for years. Regular activity helps to strengthen muscles and may improve balance, stamina and flexibility at any age, as well as reducing joint pain. This all helps to reduce the risk of a fall.

Being active every day means that you are more likely to be able to carry on doing the things you enjoy. Getting out and about regularly can help you to keep in touch with family and friends and stay independent.

## Choosing the best activities for you

Keeping active and doing some exercise should be fun. Meeting up with a friend to do an activity that you enjoy together can help you both become more active.

There are many ordinary daily activities that you can do to keep active, such as walking, gardening or even doing the housework.

Going out with friends or a walking group to places that you know have good lighting and some seats to rest can increase your confidence and make you feel safe.



### Leisure centres

Your local leisure centre offers a range of exercises, including classes for people of all ages with different interests and abilities. They will have a list of activities and classes to give you ideas.

Telephone: look in your phone book under 'leisure centres'. [www.activescotland.org.uk](http://www.activescotland.org.uk)



If you are already reasonably active, you may still need to ensure your strength, balance and bone health is at its best. Tai Chi and any form of dancing are great activities to help your bones, muscles and balance.

If you enjoy walking, Paths for All have information on health walks in your area: call **01259 218888** or visit **[www.pathsforall.org.uk](http://www.pathsforall.org.uk)**



**Tai Chi and any form of dancing are great activities to help your bones, muscles and balance.**

## Safety tips for getting moving

If you can, when you are walking, try to make sure your steps are the same length and that you lift your feet. Stand tall, let your arms swing naturally at your sides and look straight ahead.

When you need to look down, do this with your eyes, not your head. Taking slightly shorter steps will help when you're turning corners.


Always take your time getting up to answer the phone or doorbell and when hanging out the washing.

If you feel dizzy when you get up from a chair or bed, try moving your legs in a slow marching action before standing up. Remember to move slowly because your blood pressure can drop when you stand up and your body may take a little while to adjust.

Dizziness is often a reason for people falling. It can be caused by:

- a drop in blood pressure when you stand up too quickly
- missing a meal or not drinking enough water
- the side effects of medication.

If feeling dizzy is a problem for you, ask your GP about it.

A photograph of a male doctor in a white lab coat and a striped tie, with a teal stethoscope around his neck, sitting at a desk. He is looking towards an elderly male patient with white hair, who is wearing a blue sweater over a light blue shirt. The doctor is holding a yellow document and pointing to it. The patient is looking at the document. On the desk, there is a computer monitor, a keyboard, a mouse, a silver water bottle, and a box of tissues. The background shows a typical office or clinic setting.

**If you do feel dizzy for whatever reason, or if you have ever experienced a blackout or lost consciousness, it is important that you speak to your GP.**

## What if I have medical conditions?

If you have certain medical conditions, there may be some exercises or activities that aren't right for you. If you're not sure what you should and shouldn't do, speak to your GP before starting any new exercises.

After a fall, many people become less active and stop going out. This may make matters worse – you can lose confidence and make your legs weaker. If you have had a fall, it is even more important that you stay active, and do this safely.

You may have been given fall prevention advice by an exercise professional, falls specialist nurse or physiotherapist. Keep doing any exercises they have suggested, unless you are injured or your health has changed.

Only do exercises you feel safe and confident doing. If you need help or advice about activities you can do, speak to a physiotherapist or exercise professional.

## Tips for keeping active

Keeping active will help both your physical and mental health. It is important to remember that:


- Some physical activity is better than none. If you don't feel that you are able to do exercises standing up, doing some light lifting with your arms when sitting down also counts as physical activity.

- Everyone should avoid sitting down for long periods of time (being sedentary). Try to break the time up by getting up regularly.
- If you can't exercise safely standing up, ask a physiotherapist or exercise professional to suggest exercises you can try when sitting down.
- Physical activity should be fun, as well as good for you.



**Build up the amount  
of physical activity  
you are doing slowly.**



A photograph showing the lower half of a person standing next to a green patterned sofa. The person is wearing white trousers, a brown belt, and brown moccasin shoes. The floor is covered with a floral patterned rug. The text is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

**Try to avoid sitting for more than 2 hours at a time. If you're watching television, remember to get up and move around every so often.**

## How much physical activity should I do?

Aim to do 150 minutes of physical activity each week. This means doing roughly 30 minutes of activity on most days of the week.

- Activities lasting for 10 minutes or more have more benefit for you.
- The activity should cause you to breathe slightly harder and feel a bit warmer.
- Aim to stay within your own comfort level. Begin with activities that you know you can do comfortably, and increase the amount you do over time.

To reduce your risk of falls, it is also important to do activities twice a week that will help your strength and balance.

Balance exercises can help you to become steadier on your feet. An example of a balance exercise is gently rising onto your toes and down again, making sure you are holding onto something solid like a kitchen work-top.

Strength exercises help the muscles in your body become stronger and more powerful. Having stronger muscles will make daily activities easier to do. Activities like walking up and down stairs repeatedly or practising standing up from a chair (if you are able) will help to build up strength.





**There are many simple checks that can be done to reduce your risk of trips and falls at home.**

# How can I move about safely?

As well as looking after yourself, you need to be aware of other hazards that could cause a trip and fall in your home or when you are out and about.

## In the home

There are many trip hazards that are easy to do something about, such as:

- poor lighting
- loose rugs
- trailing cables
- leaving clutter on the floor or stairs.

If you have been living in your house for a long time it is often difficult to recognise these risks, so it's often helpful to have someone else, such as a friend, relative or neighbour to have a look to see if there is anything which could be made safer.

The Fire and Rescue Service also do free home fire safety checks, which include checking things that will make you safer in your home. Contact the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service on **0800 0731 999** for more information.




### **Care and Repair Scotland**

Care and Repair offer help and advice to people in Scotland aged 60 and over, or who have a disability, to repair or adapt their homes so that they can live comfortably and safely in their own community. The helpline is open Monday to Friday 9 am–5 pm.

Telephone: **0141 221 9879** (or look in your phone book for a service near you)

Email: **[enquiries@careandrepairsotland.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@careandrepairsotland.co.uk)**

**[www.careandrepairsotland.co.uk](http://www.careandrepairsotland.co.uk)**

A man with short dark hair, wearing a green and white plaid shirt, is shown from the side, reaching up with his right hand to touch a glowing purple light bulb inside a white circular ceiling fixture. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The lighting is warm, and the overall scene is a close-up of the man's action.

**If you need help changing light bulbs, or tacking down a carpet or rug, you can contact a local 'care and repair' service which can help you with these jobs.**

## Getting up during the night

Some people find that they fall, or are at most at risk of falling, when they get up during the night. If you need to get up, make sure that you put a bedside light on and put on your slippers and glasses (if you wear them).

Sit for a moment on the side of the bed and try to move your legs in a slow marching action before standing up slowly. If you find that you are getting up to the toilet more frequently in the night you could ask your GP for advice.

## Pets

Pets, especially dogs, are a great way to feel connected and to get out and about walking. However, they can get under your feet, so be aware of where they are when moving around them.

**Try putting a bell  
on your pet's collar  
so you know where  
they are.**



## Alarms

If you are worried about falling when you are alone at home, you might want to get a community alarm (sometimes called a personal alarm). Community alarms mean that you can call for help even if you can't reach for a telephone. These alarms are waterproof so can be worn in the bath, shower or garden.

Community alarms are available through your local authority or through housing associations. Contact your local authority for more information.

## Out and about

### **Walking sticks and other aids**

If you feel that you need some more support when walking about, speak to a physiotherapist about getting a walking stick or another aid that suits your needs.

Walking aids are most helpful when they have been matched to your needs, so it's a good idea to get one of your own, rather than using someone else's.

If you have a stick or walking aid already, check that it is still in good working order, for example, that the rubber stoppers are not worn down. Your local physiotherapy department will be able to help you to replace worn down rubber stoppers.





**Always see your GP after a fall – it is important to find out the cause and to find ways to reduce the chance of falling again.**

# What if I fall?

No one wants to have a fall, but you can plan ahead in case you do have one. There are some simple points to remember for any fall.

The first thing to remember is not to panic. Although you may feel shocked, try to stay calm and assess the situation. There are two plans that you can follow:

- If you think you may be hurt or can't get up without help, follow the Rest and Wait Plan.
- If you are not hurt, follow the Up and About Plan.

Both of these plans are explained on pages 36 and 37.

# Rest and Wait Plan

**1**

## Call for help

Use an alarm if you have one, or try to attract your neighbour's attention by banging on the wall or floor or shouting. If you can, use a mobile phone or crawl to a telephone and call 999.

**2**

## Move to a soft surface

If you land on a hard surface like a kitchen or bathroom floor, try to move to a place with carpet to prevent damage to your skin from the hard surface. You are also likely to be warmer on a soft surface.

**3**

## Keep warm

Try to reach for a duvet cover, blanket or clothing which is nearby in order to keep yourself warm while you wait for help to arrive. If you can, move out of any area there is a draft.

**4**

## Keep moving

If you lie in one position for too long you may become stiff, sore and cold. Try to rock gently from side to side, but if you have hurt yourself then keep the injured area still. Keep moving to stay focused until help comes.

# Up and About Plan

Every person is different and so the best way to get up off the floor after a fall will be slightly different for everyone.

It is a good idea to practise how you could get up after a fall in your home, in different rooms so that you are more confident about what to do if you do fall. This will help you decide which pieces of furniture you could use to help yourself up.

When somebody is with you, try different ways to get up. Or you could join an exercise class that practises ways to get up from the floor and other floor exercises.

If you do fall, the most important thing is to check that you are not injured, and that you are feeling well enough to get up.

## If you fall when you are with someone

If you are with somebody, you can ask them to help. Make sure that this won't make an injury worse and won't put them at risk of hurting themselves either. You could ask for some clothes or a rug to keep you warm. If they can't help to get you up, ask them to call for more help from a neighbour, the ambulance service or use a community alarm if you have one.

## If someone you know falls

If you are with someone when they fall, it is a good idea to keep them talking if they can. Don't try to lift them yourself. You may hurt yourself and also make their injuries worse by trying to help.

If you care for someone who may be at risk of falling and you need advice on the best way to help them get up after a fall, speak to a physiotherapist.



**There are lots of organisations that can help you with the issues raised in this booklet.**

# Where can I go for advice?

## Action on Hearing Loss

Telephone: **0808 808 0123** (Monday to Friday 9 am–5 pm)

Textphone: **0808 808 9000** (Monday to Friday 9 am–5 pm)

**[www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk)**

## Age Scotland

Age Scotland has a series of guides and factsheets, online information and advice on topics including health, care, money and housing.

Telephone: **0845 125 9732**

**[www.agescotland.org.uk](http://www.agescotland.org.uk)**

## Care and Repair Scotland

Telephone: **0141 221 9879** (Monday to Friday 9 am–5 pm)

Email: **[enquiries@careandrepairsotland.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@careandrepairsotland.co.uk)**

**[www.careandrepairsotland.co.uk](http://www.careandrepairsotland.co.uk)**

## Leisure centres

Telephone: look in your phone book under ‘leisure centres’

**[www.activescotland.org.uk](http://www.activescotland.org.uk)**



## National Osteoporosis Society

Telephone: **0845 450 0230** (Monday to Friday 9 am–5 pm)

**[www.nos.org.uk](http://www.nos.org.uk)**

## NHS inform

If you need information about any of the health topics in this booklet (such as smoking, healthy eating) you can contact an NHS inform adviser to find services in your area. The helpline is open every day 8 am–10 pm and also provides an interpreting service.

Telephone: **0800 22 44 88**

Textphone: **18001 0800 22 44 88**

**[www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)**

## NHS 24

If you're ill when your GP surgery is closed and need medical advice, NHS 24 is there to help you get the right care from the right people at the right time.

Telephone: **111**

**[www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)**

## RNIB Scotland

Telephone: **0303 123 9999**

(Monday to Friday 8.45 am–5.30 pm)

**[www.rnib.org.uk/scotland](http://www.rnib.org.uk/scotland)**

## Silver Line Scotland

Silver Line Scotland works with Age Scotland and is a free helpline giving information, friendship and advice to older people. It can also help people who need advice on how to support their older family or friends. It is open 24 hours a day, every day.

Telephone: **0800 4 70 80 90**

**[www.thesilverline.org.uk](http://www.thesilverline.org.uk)**

## Transport

Your local council can tell you about public transport and community transport in your area, such as MYbus, Dial-a-ride and taxi card schemes. Silver Line Scotland (above) can also give you information. If you need transport for a hospital or medical appointment, your local British Red Cross service may be able to help.

Telephone: **0844 871 11 11**

**[www.redcross.org.uk/Where-we-work/HealthandSupport](http://www.redcross.org.uk/Where-we-work/HealthandSupport)**

## Voluntary organisations

There are many voluntary or community organisations to help you keep active and healthy by giving you advice and support from volunteers. You could also try volunteering yourself.

To find your local volunteer centre call Silver Line Scotland (above) or visit the Volunteer Scotland website and search for your local area.

**[www.volunteerscotland.org.uk](http://www.volunteerscotland.org.uk)**



**You might meet a range of different health professionals who will support you in avoiding, or recovering from, a fall.**

# Healthcare professionals you might meet

Some local health services run a specialist falls prevention service. However, in most areas, help is available from day hospitals, falls clinics, community assessment and rehabilitation teams, physiotherapists and occupational therapists. Your GP or nurse can refer you to these services.

## Nurses

Nursing staff may be involved in helping to identify your falls risk. This could be within the community or at a falls assessment clinic. They may, for example, check your blood pressure, check how you take your medications, carry out vision tests or discuss your diet with you.

If you have osteoporosis, an osteoporosis specialist nurse may give you advice on how to manage your condition.

## Falls clinic doctor

Your GP may refer you to a falls clinic where a doctor will assess you to see if there is a medical reason why you have had a fall. They might take a blood sample or do some other tests. They will also look at your bone health and check your medication.

## Occupational therapists

Occupational therapists can give you advice on how to prevent or manage falls. They can review your daily activities, and any medical conditions you have, to assess your risk of falling. If you need equipment to make your life a bit easier, such as rails or walking aids, they can arrange these for you. They can also help you practise tasks around the home to make them easier for you.

You can ask for a referral to an occupational therapist through your local health centre or social work department.

## Podiatrists (new name for chiropodists)

To help reduce your risk of falls, podiatrists will assess, diagnose and treat any problems you have with your feet and legs. They work with people of all ages, especially helping older people to stay active and independent.

## Pharmacists (chemists)

Pharmacists are highly trained to give you advice on health issues and using medicines safely. Pharmacies are often open at times when other healthcare services are not and usually you don't need to make an appointment.

## Physiotherapists

Physiotherapists can check your walking and provide the right aid for you. They can assess your movement, balance and muscle strength and suggest exercises to do at home or local classes. They work in hospitals, health centres and can come to your home. Your GP can help you find a physiotherapist.

## Social work services

Social workers can help you access the services that you need and are entitled to. They support people to live as independently as possible at home and are often the main point of contact to make sure that needs assessments and carer assessments are done for you and the right support and services are put in place.

For information about your local social work service, ask your local council or call Silver Line Scotland who can give you information, advice and contact details.



**Getting out and about is really important – we can keep doing the things we enjoy and it helps us stay connected with the people most important to us. But as we get older, falling, or fear of falling, can stop us from getting out and about.**

Did you know that about one third of older people fall down at least once a year? Because of falling, many people lose their confidence, even if they have not hurt themselves.

This guide gives you tips on how to reduce your risk of trips and falls. You might not need all of this information right now, but you can dip in and out of this booklet whenever you need to find the bits that are useful to you.