

Prevention of falls

Most falls are preventable, although each fall may result from a combination of different factors. Preventing them depends on you and your health professional finding out your risks, which can be removed or reduced.

This means, if you have poor muscle strength and problems maintaining your balance, you should focus on weight-bearing and balance improving exercises and having safety equipment installed in your home. Someone who takes a number of medications, or who uses sleeping tablets and suffers from allergies, heart problems, blood pressure and sleeplessness and suffers from dizzy spells should ask their doctor to re-evaluate their medication.

Falls prevention aims to reduce the number and the impact of falls. Some prevention strategies require the support and input from a health specialist. But there is a lot you can do to minimise the risk of having your first - or recurrent - fall and to improve your overall health.

It is vital that you **take some precaution when carrying out daily activities and moving around**. Depending on your medical condition and personal circumstances, you can help prevent falls by:

- carrying out small changes at home;
- wearing shoes with low heels and rubber soles that fit well and fully support your feet;
- using walking aids (when needed);
- having your eyes tested and wearing the right glasses;
- wearing your hearing aids if needed;
- using a personal alarm system;

Eating a healthy diet, reducing the amount of alcohol you drink, giving up smoking and exercising - in short **looking after yourself** - is also very important. Even small changes to your lifestyle can be beneficial to your health. A healthy diet and getting active will not only help you to feel better and reduce the chances of falling ill, it will also help you to lead an active and independent life.

Preventing falls in the home

You can cut down the risk of falling by making simple changes to your home.

Bathroom

- Use a non-slip mat in the bath or shower and in front of it for safe exit and entry. Wipe wet floor immediately.
- Have grab rails installed that can assist you with getting in and out of the bath.

Bedroom

- Have a bedside lamp or a torch within easy reach in case you need to get up at night.
- Make sure that you can easily reach your glasses and walking aid before getting out of bed.
- Your bed should be a good height for getting in and out safely.

Kitchen

- Items you use regularly should be stored in easy reach between hip and eye level. This avoids the need to stoop or stretch.
- All extension cords and appliance cords should be secured and not lying around in the room.
- Wipe away spilled liquids immediately to avoid slipping.

Living room

- Arrange the furniture in a way that you can move about easily. Remove any furniture you do not use.
- Repair loose carpets; fix rug edges to the floor with double-sided tape.
- Don't place heaters and fans in the middle of the room to avoid tripping.

Stairs

- Have any damaged steps repaired.
- Highlight the edges of steps (3 inches on top of each step) with bright paint or non-slip tape in a contrasting colour to make them more visible.
- Have handrails fitted to either side of the steps.
- Make sure the stairs are well lit and free of clutter.

Factsheet 6.3

Wearing the right shoes

Properly fitted shoes can reduce foot problems and may also improve your balance and stability. **Shoes that don't fit right can cause serious foot problems and also can cause falls.**

However, there is no such thing as a perfect shoe. Feet come in different shapes and sizes, and everybody has different requirements when it comes to selecting a safe shoe.

Choose the right shoe for your activity. While a shoe with a little heel can be good for a special occasion, lace ups are best for when you are active and walk around a lot.

Avoid wearing loose-fitting or open-backed slippers, sandals, or shoes with heels; they might cause you to slip or trip. Shoes need to fit well - even if you are only wearing them around the house. Wearing safe, supportive shoes is therefore a good way of preventing falls.

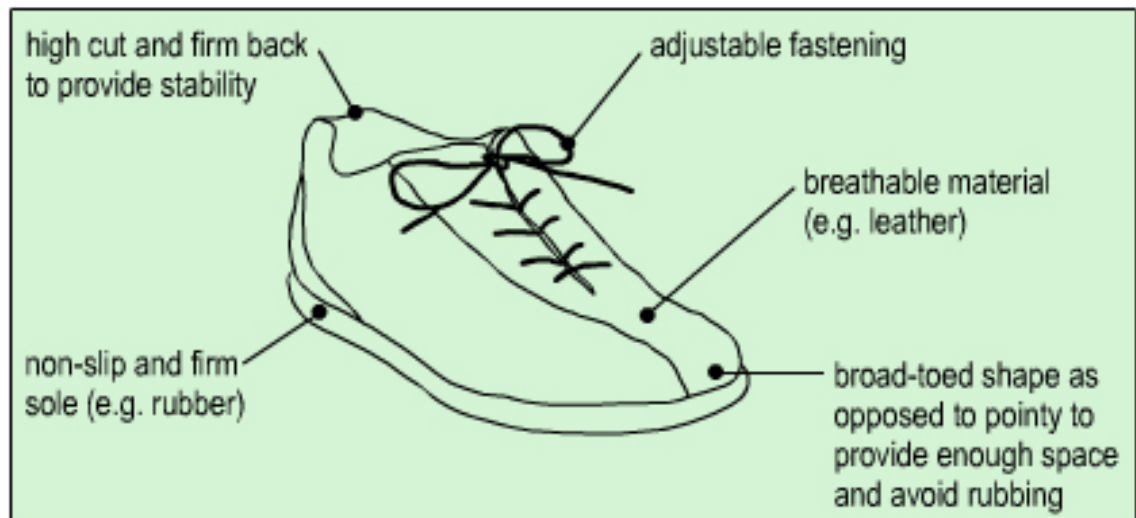


Figure: What makes a shoe safe?

When **buying shoes** make sure that they are deep enough and wide enough; your toes should not touch the end of the shoe - you need a gap of about half an inch (1cm) at the end of your longest toe. Don't buy shoes that need 'breaking in', they should be comfortable straight away.

Shop for shoes later in the day when your feet are largest (most feet tend to swell during the day).

Exercises in the home

Taking up exercise has many benefits, even for those who have been inactive for years. Regular exercise helps to strengthen muscles and may improve balance, stamina and suppleness at any age, as well as reducing joint pain. This all helps to reduce a risk of a fall and stay active.

Below you can see a selection of simple exercises you can do at home.

Heel raises

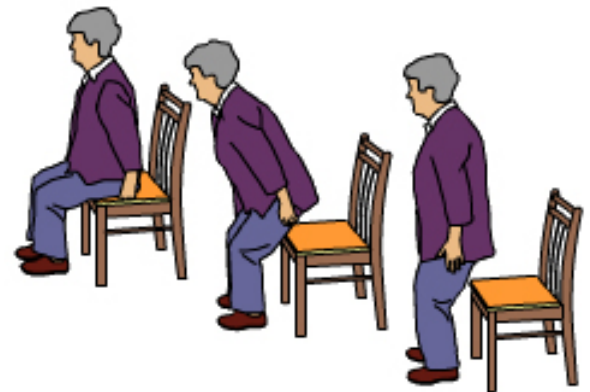
Stand straight with your feet and legs about one inch apart and your hands just in front of your body at about waist height. Hold onto a chair for support. Lift your heel and body up as far as possible by pushing up through the balls of your feet. Hold for a second, then lower your heels with control until they reach the floor before lifting up again. Repeat until your legs begin to tire; build up gradually to a maximum of 10 repetitions.

Toe raises

Stand straight with your feet and legs about one inch apart and your hands just in front of your body at about waist height. Hold onto a chair for support. Lift your toes off the floor as far as possible. Ensure that you keep your big toes in line with the knees and avoid leaning backwards and sticking your bottom out. Hold for a second, then lower your toes back to the floor, keeping the movement controlled. Rest and repeat. Build up gradually to 10 repetitions.

Sit to stand

Sit tall at the front of the chair, your knees hip-width apart and feet facing forward. Rest your hands lightly on the seat or arms of your chair. Lean forward slightly from the hips and tighten your tummy muscles. Press down your thighs and feet as you lift your body weight about an inch off the chair. Lower yourself slowly back to the start. As you progress, raise your body an extra inch at a time, until you stand tall in one swift, controlled movement. Make sure the chair is stable. Build up to eight repetitions.



Getting out of chair

Caution: If you find these exercises very uncomfortable ask your doctor for advice.

Factsheet 6.5

Healthy eating Nourishing snacks and drinks

Certain foods and drinks contain more energy and nutrients that may help you to build up. It is best to include these foods as often as possible during the day between your meals.

Try some of these ideas:

Nourishing snacks

- Cheese and Crackers or toast
- Sandwiches (egg, cheese, meat, fish)
- Baked beans or spaghetti, cheese on buttered toast
- Fried, scrambled or poached egg on toast
- Chapatti/pitta filled with tuna and sweetcorn
- Toasted crumpets/teacakes with butter or cheese
- Pies e.g. meat or vegetable
- Samosas
- Sausage rolls or scotch eggs
- Crisps/chips with dips
- Breakfast cereal with fortified milk*
- Full fat yoghurt
- Mousse
- Semolina, Tapioca, Vermicelli, Sago etc.
- Milk Jelly
- Crème caramel
- Rice pudding
- Ice cream with sauce
- Custard e.g. banana or baked egg custards
- Ready prepared desserts e.g. fruit pies with cream, trifle, sponge pudding and custard
- Cakes, pastries, biscuits, chocolate

Nourishing drinks

- Fortified Milk*
- Full fat milk
- Flavoured milk e.g. milk shakes
- Hot chocolate
- Milky beverages such as Ovaltine, Horlicks
- Fruit smoothies
- Lassi
- Instant soups with milk powder Complan, Build-up, Nourishment, Nutrament (short-term)

***Fortified milk** can be made by mixing 4 tablespoons of skimmed milk powder with one pint of milk. The fortified milk can be used to replace 'ordinary' milk in tea, coffee, cereal, desserts, sauces, porridge ect. You can also use the milk powder in soups and stews.

Healthy eating Adding energy to your food

The following advice is aimed at non-diabetic people with poor appetite and loss of weight. Those with diabetes should seek their dietician's advice. It is important that the food you eat provides you with enough energy and nutrients to help your body function well. This may also stop you losing weight.

Remember:

1. Have small frequent attractive meals e.g. try to eat every 3-4 hours
2. Include nourishing snacks and drinks between meals
3. Use full fat foods rather than diet/low calorie or low fat foods
4. Choose meals which you enjoy
5. Select foods that are easy to eat and swallow.

Here are some tips on ways to fortify foods:

Use full fat, evaporated or condensed milk in milky drinks e.g. milk shakes, tea or coffee ... soups, sauces or desserts
Add butter or margarine to mashed potatoes or vegetables ... rice or pasta ... porridge ... soup
Sprinkle grated cheese onto mashed potatoes, vegetables or pasta ... beans on toast or scrambled eggs ... soup
Add cream to coffee or tea ... yoghurt, tinned fruit or other puddings ... porridge or in milk used on other cereals ... soup or sauces ... mashed potato
Use oil for frying (be aware of fire hazard) ... on pasta, rice, vegetables or salads
Add sugar to bread and butter ... cereal ... desserts such as mousse, custard etc.
Spread jam onto cream crackers or bagels
Other ideas spread butter or margarine thickly on bread, toast or scones ... use mayonnaise or salad cream in sandwiches ... use coconut cream and milk

*If you have **diabetes**, speak to your GP practice nurse or dietician before trying any of these suggestions.*

Factsheet 6.7

Healthy eating Store cupboard ideas

Having a store of some basic foods can be useful if you can't get to the shops regularly. Here are a few ideas:



Milk:

Long-life, dried or evaporated milk, tinned milk pudding, long-life custard.



Meat, fish and alternatives:

Tinned corned beef or ham, sardines, pilchards and tuna.

Canned beans or pulses e.g. red kidney beans, butter beans, mixed beans.



Fruit, vegetables and fruit juices:

A variety of tinned fruit and vegetables, including baked beans; dried fruits; long-life pure fruit juice; instant mashed potato; lentils and other dried beans and peas



Cereals:

Breakfast cereals, porridge, crackers, crispbreads, plain biscuits, pasta and rice.

Tinned spaghetti or other tinned ready meals.



Other:

Tinned and dried soups, meat and yeast extract; stock cubes;

Freezer ideas:



Frozen meats, frozen chips, ready made meals, fish portions, fish fingers, bread and rolls, frozen vegetables, ice cream

Remember only to buy food that you like and will use! Store cupboard foods don't keep forever, so as you use them replace with new foods. Check the "use-by" dates on the tins and packets regularly.

Healthy eating Soft food ideas

Breakfast ideas:

- Breakfast cereals, well soaked in hot or cold milk e.g. Weetabix
- Oatmeal or cornmeal porridge/cornmeal porridge made with full fat milk/condensed milk
- Baked beans, tinned spaghetti, scrambled egg
- Soft tinned or stewed fruit with cream or yoghurt
- Soft fresh fruit - banana, strawberries etc
- Yoghurt or fromage frais

Main meal ideas:

- Dahl and rice
- Minced or liquidised meat or chicken with extra gravy
- Soft stews and casseroles, shepherd's pie, corned beef hash
- Spaghetti bolognaise, macaroni cheese
- Scrambled eggs (eggs should be well cooked)
- Poached or steamed fish in a sauce, fish pie, fish cakes
- Cheese and potato pie
- Mashed potato with extra butter and milk/cheese
- Try sweet potato, mashed with butter
- Mashed or liquidised vegetables with extra butter or sauce

Snack ideas:

- Soups - especially made with lentils, peas or other pulses
- Sandwiches (without crusts) with grated cheese, cream cheese, cheese
- Spread, tinned fish, smooth peanut butter or other soft filling

Dessert ideas:

- Milk puddings, custards, crème caramel
- Ice cream, soft trifles, mousses, jellies, 'instant whips' etc
- Yoghurt, milky drinks, milk shakes
- Stewed apple, mashed banana, tinned fruit with condensed milk/evaporated milk