

Factsheet 2

Why falls occur

The reason why older people have accidental falls can vary and can be due to factors inherent in the individual's body and environmental factors. Researchers have established over 400 different risk factors. Usually falls are caused by more than one risk factor. Often it is a combination of various risk factors, which cause a fall.

The causes of falls are many but underlying problems usually are muscle weakness, impaired balance and poor vision resulting from diseases or from side-effects of medication combined with environmental hazards (slippery floors, loose rugs).

As we get older our bodies become more likely to develop conditions that can cause us to fall. Our muscles can become weaker and our eyesight and hearing may decline. We may suffer from chronic illnesses such as Parkinson's disease, Arthritis, Osteoporosis, postural hypotension (sudden drop in blood pressure causing dizziness when we stand up) or heart problems and have to take some medication. Physicians refer to these factors as **intrinsic** because they are inherent in our bodies.

Environmental (or so-called **extrinsic**) factors refer to all the potential hazards in our surroundings that may contribute to you falling. This could be a loose rug, a cable running across the room, or an uneven paving slab.

Environmental factors are very seldom the only reason for a fall. However, if, for example, a person has one or more underlying, medical conditions they can trigger a fall. The surroundings can also influence how secure and confident we feel. At home we feel safe because we know every corner. This makes us become careless when carrying out our daily activities. When we are out and about and are unfamiliar with the surroundings, we may not be aware of some potential hazards.

Please note: Not all of the above mentioned factors have been proven to contribute to a fall, but some may add to the risk of falling or can make related injuries more severe. Arthritis or Osteoporosis are examples of these risk factors.