

Maintaining Independence and Keeping Well

Falls, slips and trips are the most common type of accident in the home. Many people are seriously injured every year, which can lead to a reduction in their quality of life.



Falls

Within Kirklees, it is estimated that approximately 25,000 people over 65 years old fall every year. Some of these will result in a broken bone, require hospital treatment and lead to a loss of independence.

Bone Health

Human bones are constantly changing with new bone replacing the old bone. This process requires calcium, which provides bone strength and structure. Osteoporosis develops when the bone loss is greater than the bone growth causing bones to become fragile. This makes them at risk of breaking more easily. One in two women and one in five men over 50 will suffer a broken bone, mainly because of osteoporosis. The most common forms of broken bones are the hip, spine, wrist and sometimes the pelvis. Coping with a broken bone is not only very painful but also makes independent living difficult and may cause long-term problems with mobility. Falling is not an inevitable part of getting older; by taking some sensible precautions most accidental falls can be prevented.

What you can do

General health and wellbeing can make a big difference to your quality of life, whatever your age. Eating well, keeping fit, looking after your body are all important and can help you stay mobile and independent.

Improving your strength and balance

Falls can be due to weak muscles and poor balance. You can improve these by:

- Regular exercise such as walking, gardening, housework, dancing, keep-fit classes, or chair-based exercises.
- Regular gentle exercise and massage to relieve arthritic pain and swelling.
- Balance training exercises, such as T'ai Chi.

Remember if you are new to exercise speak to your GP first. Take it gently at first. For more information on exercising visit the Age UK website at www.ageuk.org.uk or contact Kirklees Physical Activity Development Team (PALS) on **01484 234095**. For a selection of exercises to help you maintain your independence please refer to the 'Becoming more active at home' booklet. Don't give up on exercise just because you have had a fall or are afraid of falling. Reducing your exercise can actually make you more prone to falling!

Healthy eating

Ensure that you keep your bones strong by eating a healthy balanced diet, which contains:

- Meat, fish, and vegetarian alternatives; bread, cereals, and potatoes; milk and dairy foods: fats and sugars (minimise if overweight); fruit and vegetables.
- Calcium – get plenty of calcium in your diet, which can be found in milk, cheese, and yoghurt. If you do not like dairy products or are unable to eat them you may get enough calcium from non-dairy foods such as: Broccoli, Spinach, Baked beans, White bread.
- Vitamin D – found in oily fish (e.g., sardines, tuna), meat and added to foods such as breakfast cereals. Ten minutes of sun on your face and hands every day will help. Vitamin D helps the body absorb the calcium and is mainly obtained through the skin's exposure to sunlight. A calcium and Vitamin D supplement available from your GP maybe advisable

Managing your health

Medicines

If you are taking regular medicines, make sure you have a medication review every year at least. If your medicines make you feel faint or dizzy make sure you let your GP or nurse know. Always follow the instructions on your medicines. Never mix alcohol with medication. Only take medicines that are prescribed for you. If you have any concerns about the medications you are taking your local pharmacist is always available for advice.

Flu

Flu can make you unsteady on your feet. Flu jabs are available. Consult your GP.

Eyesight

Your vision plays an important role in your sense of balance so make sure you have your eyes checked regularly (once every two years up to 75 years of age after 75 once every year, once yearly for diabetics.) Separate glasses for reading and distance are safer than bifocals or varifocals and will help to enhance floor level objects to avoid trips. Eye tests are free if you are aged 60 or over. You may be able to get help with the cost of glasses – ask your optician for advice. Free eye tests are available at home if +necessary – contact Patient Advice & Liaison Service (PALS) for more information.

Feet

Looking after your feet and having your feet checked either by you or your partner, relatives or carers is very important. Foot problems can have a major impact on mobility, balance, and stability. Even something as simple as a long toenail digging into your skin can cause problems.

- Wash your feet daily in warm soapy water.
- Reduce hard skin by using a foot file or pumice stone.
- Keep skin supple by using a moisturiser.
- Trim or file toenails often.
- If you have difficulty attending to your own feet, you may wish to contact a chiropodist in your area.
- If you have other health problems, e.g., diabetes, your local podiatry service may be able to help and can be contacted through your health centre or GP practice.

Clothes and shoes

Avoid wearing loose fitting or open backed footwear or trailing clothing that might cause you to trip or slip. Wear flat shoes with a broad-based heel. Ideally these should have a fastening of Velcro or laces as opposed to a slip-on shoe and should have a manmade sole for comfort and grip. Try to avoid walking in socks or tights on slippery floors, or when climbing the stairs.

Small changes in your home can help reduce accidents:

- Use non-slip mats or grippers under rugs if you have any in the house. It is advisable not to have any rugs or mats in the house, as they may cause you to trip. Avoid loose rugs in doorways.
- Handrails by the front/back door and by the toilet, bath and stairs will make getting round easier. Rails need to be fixed firmly and checked on a regular basis.
- Good lighting is very important particularly on the stairs. Use a high wattage light bulb. If you need to go to the toilet in the night, turn on a light so you can see where you are going or buy a plug-in night-light (available from D.I.Y stores).
- Keep the floor clear of trailing electrical flexes, fraying carpet edges and clutter.
- Some pets can get under your feet – think about giving them a brightly coloured collar to make them more visible or a small bell to attract attention.
- Consider getting a cordless phone or an answering machine, so that you don't have to rush to answer the phone.

Small changes help reduce accidents (continued):

- Always mop up spills immediately.
- See if you can get help for chores such as changing curtains, bedding or light bulbs.
- Make sure you have everything you need e.g., soap, towels etc. within easy reach before taking a bath or shower. Bath boards and seats need to be checked before each use.
- Remove casters from furniture to make it more stable.

The Handyperson Services offer help with making changes around the home to prevent falls. The services are free and they can carry out small-scale jobs around the home such as tacking down a carpet, fixing curtain rails, installing hand and grab rails and moving furniture.

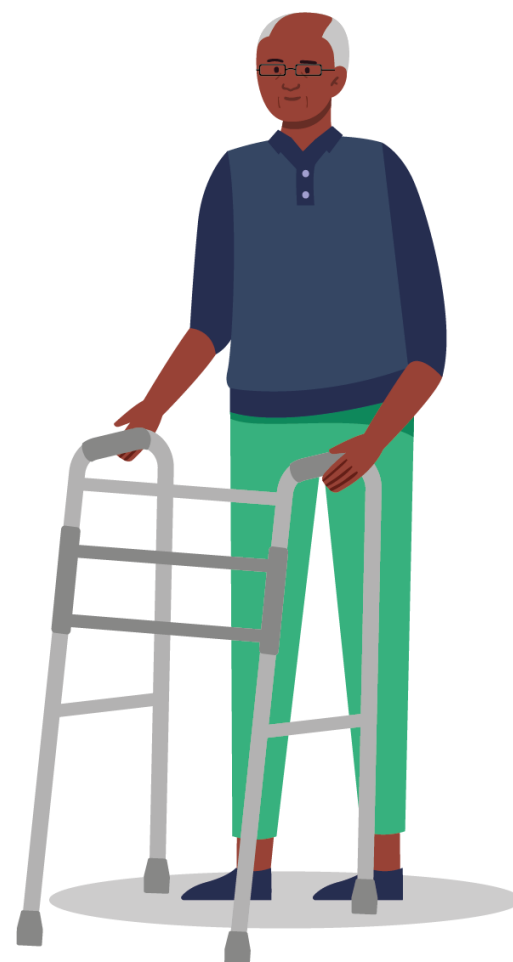
Handyman Service: **01484 845492** (all areas in Kirklees).

If you are worried about falling when you are alone at home, you could think about getting a community alarm with a pendant. This will allow you to call for help from your home even if you can't reach a telephone. You contact a 24-hour response centre by pressing a button a pendant or wristband that you wear all the time. You can also answer your phone by pressing your pendant.

To find out more about community alarms and Social Services contact: Gateway to Care **01484 414933**

Care phone services provide reassurance, peace of mind and a response to emergency situations 24 hours a day every day.

There is a charge for this service. Carephones **01924 326403**



What to do if you have a fall?

Try not to panic

You will probably feel a little shocked and shaken but try to stay calm. Don't get up straight away, give yourself time to collect yourself and get your breath back. Your family/carer should not try to lift you up. Get help if you can. Try to attract attention by banging on the wall, using a personal alarm (if you have one) or calling 999 if you can reach a phone.

- Try to move to a soft surface e.g., carpeted area.
- Try to keep warm by reaching for something to use as a blanket to cover you with.
- Mop up any moisture.
- Keep moving – roll from side to side and move your arms and legs if possible.

If you feel that you can get up, use the guidelines below:

1. Roll onto hands and knees and crawl to stable piece furniture such as a bed or chair.
2. With hands on the support, place one foot flat on the floor, bending your knee in front of your tummy.
3. Lean forwards, push on your feet and hands until you bring the other foot to be beside the first.
4. Turn and sit on the seat. You should rest for a while before getting up.
5. Notify your GP when you have fallen. If you are starting to experience falling and losing your confidence, please ask your GP to refer you to the Falls Service.

We will try to work out what is making you likely to fall and will look at ways to reduce your risk of falling – for example doing exercises, testing your eyesight, checking your home for hazards and looking at your medicine to see if it needs changing.

Try to have blankets and towels placed around your home so that in the event of you being on the floor after a fall you can keep warm and dry up any moisture. This will prevent any further complications such as hypothermia.

Safety tips

- Resist the temptation to hurry if the telephone or doorbell rings. Warn callers or visitors that it may take you a while to answer the phone or door.
- Consider a cordless phone, pendant alarm or pull cord alarm system that can be used in the event of an emergency.
- Check furniture regularly for wobbly legs or loose joints and get problems fixed as soon as they arise.
- Avoid going out in ice and snow and try to keep paths free from slippery leaves, moss or overhanging branches.
- Consider fitting automatic security lights to the outside of your home.
- Ask someone to paint a white line on the edge of a step or path that is hard to see.
- Strong, well-fitted grab rails can make a real difference to the safety of steps and stairs.
- Ensure that all electrical flexes and telephone cords are tucked well out of the way.
- Check that it is easy to switch a light on from your bed so you do not get out of bed in the dark.
- Ensure that floors and stair coverings are in good repair, to avoid tripping.
- Rugs and mats can cause a person to trip. Ensure they are flat and non-slip, or better still, remove altogether.
- Check that stairs are clutter free.
- Some people can have trouble with getting on or off their toilet, commode or chair or getting in and out of bed. If you are struggling with any of these consider contacting your Practice Nurse, District Nurse or GP.
- Consider making arrangements for someone to do your shopping in bad weather.
- Wheelchairs - check brakes and tyre pressures regularly.
- Walking sticks and frames should only be used by the person they have been prescribed for, to make sure they are of the correct height and design to meet the person's needs. Keep walking aids within easy reach. Ferrules (rubber bit on the end of walking sticks) need to be checked regularly to make sure they have good grip.

If you do have a pendant or wrist alarm, please ensure that you wear it at all times during the day – this can save your life. Always ask someone to help you – never take a risk.

Patient plan