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How you can help prevent a fall at home

Why falls matter

Most of us will have experienced a fall at some point. For many, it might be nothing more than a bit embarrassing. But a fall can be startling, upsetting and life-changing, especially as we get older.

There are several reasons why people fall, this can be down to personal risk factors such as weak muscles, poor balance and walking difficulties. If you are vulnerable to falling or you care for somebody who is vulnerable, there are actions you can take to minimise falls around the home.

At home, we tend to move around without thinking about our safety as it is where we are comfortable and where we spend much of our time. Falls prevention in and around the home may seem like common sense, however, it isn't always easy to recognise the things that can cause trips, slips and falls.



Falls at home could be caused by:



Clutter

Clutter in the home, especially at low levels or on the floor, can be a real trip and slip hazard. i.e shopping bags on a kitchen floor.



Poor lighting

Poor lighting can include dim lights, shadows, dark areas or lighting that is too bright. These conditions can make obstacles, changes in floor level and other hazards harder to see, increasing the risk of falls, particularly for older adults.

Prevention advice

Many falls could be prevented by making a few small changes in your home. An important first step toward preventing falls at home is to remove anything that could cause you to trip or slip while walking around.

To do this:

- clear clutter from floors or stairs – including small furniture, pet bowls, trailing cables, or other things that can cause you to trip
- avoid leaving or storing items on stairs and hallways
- arrange furniture to give plenty of room to walk freely
- remove loose mats and rugs to reduce the risk of tripping accidentally
- improve lighting
- store frequently used items within easier reach
- change or adapt furniture and furnishings to give more support.

These changes may also make it easier to get around your home and carry out daily activities.

It can be helpful to have someone else, such as a friend, relative or neighbour you trust to have a look with you to see if there is anything that could be made safer.



Uneven surfaces

A change of level between rooms, uneven surfaces in gardens, carpets and rugs, loose floor coverings, changes in flooring and steps to and from doorways can cause trip hazards and make walking or balance more difficult.



Slippery floors

Icy and slippery conditions are well known to cause slips, but there are also hazards inside the home. Wet surfaces, such as in the bath or shower, or spills on the kitchen floor, can increase the risk of slipping.

Support

Healthcare professionals take falls in older people very seriously because of the significant impact they can have on their health and wellbeing.

As a result, there's a great deal of help and support available for older people, and it's worth asking your GP or healthcare professional about the various options.

Your GP or healthcare professional may refer you to a specialist falls prevention service to carry out some simple tests to check your balance. Your GP or healthcare professional can also review any medicines you're taking in case their side effects may increase your risk of falling.

Your GP or healthcare professional may also recommend:

- looking after your eyes with a sight test if you're having problems with your vision, even if you already wear glasses
- having an electrocardiogram (ECG) and checking your blood pressure while lying and standing
- requesting a home hazard assessment, where someone visits your home to identify potential hazards and give advice
- doing exercises to improve your strength and balance.

For further information visit nwas.nhs.uk/falls or scan the QR code opposite with your smartphone.

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