

# Herefordshire Falls Prevention Service

## Staying safe and steady

Herefordshire Falls Prevention Service is a free NHS service for older people who have fallen, are at risk of or are worried about falling, or have concerns about their balance.

The service can help people to:

- Identify the cause of falls
- Prevent further falls
- Improve strength, balance, mobility and dizziness
- Regain confidence
- Maintain independence

## Preventing falls

30 percent of people over the age of 65 fall each year and falls are the third most common cause of accidental death in Herefordshire. This will rise with the ageing and growing population and many of these falls will result in fractures. The cost to society is huge, not to mention the personal cost of falling to the individual.

There are many reasons as to why people fall, but falls are not an inevitable part of getting older and many falls can be prevented. You may be at risk of falling if:

- You have fallen before
- You take four or more medications a day
- You have trouble with your balance
- You have difficulty walking or rising from a low bed or chair
- You have a fear of falling
- Your medications have been changed within the last two weeks
- You have vision or hearing problems
- You suffer from incontinence
- You suffer from poor memory or depression
- You wear the wrong footwear or have foot problems
- Your home is cluttered, poorly lit, or has loose fitting carpets or rugs, etc.

There are lots of simple things that you can do to help you stay steady on your feet, whether you are worried about falling, are fit and active, or have difficulty with your mobility.

## Be active

You can help to prevent falls by staying fit and active. Physical activity helps to improve mobility, strength, balance, flexibility and stamina.

There are a variety of ways to be active which can include gardening, housework, walking, swimming and exercise classes.

If you are already active, Tai Chi and dancing are good activities to help you keep good balance and stronger muscles and bones.

It is also possible to do some simple balance training exercises at home. If you have a health condition and are unsure as to what exercise is right for you, please discuss it with your GP before exercising.

For more information regarding exercise opportunities in Herefordshire, please refer to the Falls Prevention Service website, details are available on the back page of this leaflet.

## Stay healthy

Getting your Flu jab and taking advantage of health checks offered by your doctor will help maintain your wellbeing. Being unwell can cause people to fall.

Avoid missing meals and eat regular meals throughout the day.

Try to drink at least eight cups of fluid each day, or approximately one litre. Caffeinated drinks, such as tea and coffee, can act as a diuretic and make you want to pass urine, so make sure that the fluid you drink includes lots of water.

Try and eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day; fresh, frozen, chilled, canned, 100 percent juice, and dried fruit and vegetables all count.

Dizziness can be a reason for falling. There can be many causes for dizziness so it is worth speaking with your GP if dizziness is a problem for you. It is also important to speak with your GP if you have ever lost consciousness or blacked out.

## Understand your medicines

Ask for an annual medication review by your GP if you are taking four or more medicines.

Tell the doctor or pharmacist if you are experiencing any side effects. With regular monitoring, problems can be easily avoided or minimised. There may also be an alternative drug that can be used.

Some medications can cause dizziness, drowsiness, or affect your balance, so be extra careful when rising from lying to sitting or from sitting to standing. It is also important to take your medicines at the right time of day, following any specific instructions given.

When buying medicines over-the-counter always inform the pharmacist of any prescribed and over-the-counter medicines you are already taking. Similarly, when seeing your doctor, inform him / her of any over-the-counter medication you may be using.

Alcohol will increase the risk of falls whether combined with medication or not.

## Foot health

Certain foot problems can affect balance as well as cause pain and discomfort so it is important to report any foot concerns to your podiatrist or GP.

Footwear should be comfortable and ideally have a fastening, low heels, high sides and a good tread. Slippers should have backs and a fastening.

It is best to wear shoes or slippers during the day; walking around the house in socks or bare feet can increase the risk of slipping or falling.

If you use insoles or splints and have not had these checked for a while please make contact with the service that you got them from.

## Eyesight

Eyesight plays an important part in balance and mobility.

It is important to have your eyes checked and glasses prescription reviewed at least every two years, or every year if over 70 years of age. Remember to tell your optician if you have had a fall.

If you notice changes in vision go and see your optician, don't wait until your next eye test.

Bi-focal and vari-focal glasses can alter perception of distance and so care must be taken on stairs and steps, uneven pavements and kerbs.

## Hearing

Hearing loss is more likely with increasing age and problems with hearing can affect balance.

It is important to have regular hearing checks and ensure hearing aids are well maintained.

Speak with your GP if you have noticed a change in your hearing.

## Fear of falling

Whether you have fallen before or not you may feel anxious about falling. This can sometimes lead to avoiding moving about, which can result in a reduction in muscle strength. This in turn can increase your risk of falling.

If you feel worried or anxious about falling tell a health professional, there are services available to help.

## Bone health

It is important to keep your bones healthy; there is less chance of breaking a bone through falling if you keep your bones strong.

It is possible to do things to help make bones stronger.

Eat a well-balanced diet including foods that are rich in calcium and vitamin D, which are both essential for healthy bones.

Examples of sources of calcium include:

- Dairy produce and eggs
- Green leafy vegetables
- Nuts
- Bony fish such as sardines and pilchards
- Soya beans and tofu
- Fortified cereals

Sunshine is a good source of vitamin D. If you are unable to get outside you may need to speak with your GP to see whether you may benefit from some supplements.

Also, being active and doing weight-bearing exercises such as walking, can help to keep your bones healthier, as well as stopping smoking and limiting the amount of alcohol you drink.

## Keeping safe

Check any walking aids are in good working order

Keep the house well lit, especially the stairs and landing

Take care when getting out of bed at night and turn on a night-light, lamp or torch to light the way

Check the house for trip hazards, such as rugs, cables, frayed carpets, or clutter

Handrails on both sides of stairs can make them safer

Be aware of where pets are when moving around

Keep warm; cold muscles do not work well

Take time when rising from lying to sitting or from sitting to standing as moving too quickly can make people feel light-headed

Avoid trailing clothes that could trip you up

Keep things in easy reach to avoid overstretching, climbing or bending

Do not rush to answer the door or telephone

Watch out for uneven paths and slippery surfaces outside

Consider a community alarm and ensure it is worn

Make a plan in the event of having a fall at home

If adaptations, handrails or specialised equipment are needed at home, then an occupational therapist may be able to help and advise.

## **How to cope if you have a fall**

If you have a fall, stay calm and try not to panic.

### **If you are injured or unable to get up:**

(Or if you have had a hip or knee replacement in the past 6 weeks)

#### **Attract help**

- Use a telephone or personal alarm
- Bang on the floor or wall or shout
- Use a mobile phone or crawl to a telephone if able

#### **Keep warm**

- Cover yourself with towels/ blankets/ rugs/ coats, etc.

#### **Keep moving**

- Try to change position and move all your joints
- Move to a dry space if you relieve your bladder
- Try to crawl to a softer floor if lying on a hard floor



**If you are not injured and are able to get up:**

1. Roll onto one side
2. Ease onto your elbows
3. Push up onto hands and knees into a crawling position
4. Crawl to a sturdy piece of furniture
5. Put both hands up onto the furniture
6. Bring your strongest leg up and place your foot flat on the floor
7. Push up with your arms and legs onto both feet
8. Turn around to sit and rest

- Have a rest at any stage in the process
- If you cannot get up, do not keep trying, save energy to:
- Keep warm and moving while you call and wait for help

## Have an action plan in case of a fall

### How will I get help?

- Community alarm
- Carry a telephone with you
- Know who you will telephone and have the number to hand

### Can helpers get into the house?

- Leave a key with someone you trust
- Consider a key safe

### Can I learn how to get up from the floor?

- Use this leaflet and keep it to hand
- Contact a health professional for advice

### Are you unsteady on your feet?

- Contact a health professional for advice on services to improve your balance
- Stay active
- Understand your medicines
- Drink plenty of fluids and eat well
- Look after your feet and walking aids
- Have regular vision and hearing checks
- Check for home hazards

**Tell a health professional about your fall.**

**There may be a treatable cause.**

## Useful information and contact details

### Herefordshire Falls Prevention Service

Leominster Community Hospital  
South Street  
Leominster  
HR6 8JH

Tel: 01568 617309

Fax: 01568 617306

Email: [fallsreferrals@nhs.net](mailto:fallsreferrals@nhs.net)

Website: [www.wyevalley.nhs.uk](http://www.wyevalley.nhs.uk)

(Services > Community Services > Falls)

Any health professional can refer to the service and it is also possible to self-refer, please telephone or see our website as above for details.

## How to provide feedback

Our aim is to provide a quality of care we would want for ourselves, our families and friends.

If there was anything that we could have done please let us know via the department/ward staff or the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) available Monday - Friday, 8:30am - 5pm on 01432 372986 or email us at [makingexperiencescount@wvt.nhs.uk](mailto:makingexperiencescount@wvt.nhs.uk)

This leaflet is available in large print, Braille, Audio tape or other languages upon request. Please contact PALS on the above telephone number.

Wye Valley NHS Trust: [www.wyevalley.nhs.uk](http://www.wyevalley.nhs.uk)

Telephone: 01432 355444

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