

STEADY ON YOUR FEET



Information and Advice



Falls

A fall may be the first sign of a new or worsening health condition (e.g. infection, dehydration, etc) so it is important to tell your doctor if you do have a fall.

The more details you can remember about your fall(s), the easier it is to pinpoint a cause. So think carefully about:

When it happened – Was it related to a particular time of day? Were you doing something specific at the time?

How it happened – Was it a loss of balance? Did you trip on something? Did you feel dizzy? Did you blackout?

Where it happened – is there a trip hazard you could remove? Have you fallen in this place before? If so, why could this be?

Often, rather than one specific reason, there may be a number of underlying risk factors which have played a part, many of which can be reduced by following some simple advice.

These issues may include:

- Muscle weakness
- Poor balance
- Difficulties walking or inappropriate walking aids
- Dizziness
- Environmental hazards
- Pain
- Vision and hearing problems
- Foot pain, deformity or numbness
- Badly fitting or unsupportive footwear
- Memory loss or confusion
- Poor nutrition or hydration
- Medications
- Pre-existing health conditions
- Bladder and bowel conditions
- Mood, anxiety or being worried about having a fall
- Alcohol consumption

Falling can have an impact on your confidence which may then lead to a vicious cycle of you doing less and further possibility of you falling.

Taking a pro-active approach, even if you haven't had a fall, will help you take control of the situation and allow you to remain active and independent for longer with an improved quality of life in the long term.

Swindon Borough Council

Swindon Borough Council's care and support information and advice [website](#)

Live Well Swindon

Live Well Swindon provides advice and support about being active, falls prevention, stopping smoking, weight management, connecting to communities and volunteering, managing long-term health conditions and staying independent. It also delivers a range of activities and programmes designed to inspire, motivate and assist people to live well and benefit from a healthy lifestyle.

For more information about Live Well Swindon:

Phone: [01793 465513](tel:01793465513)

Email: livewell@swindon.gov.uk

Visit Website: [The Live Well Swindon Hub](#)

Otago

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NHS Choices

NHS Choices is really helpful for all aspects of health and wellbeing on their website. You can find useful resources on falls prevention here at www.nhs.uk/conditions/falls

What's on When Guide

A WOW Guide is produced by Home Instead and lists some local activity and exercise groups. This is available through website: [The Swindon WOW Guide](#) or by phoning Home Instead on [01793 988537](tel:01793988537)

Age UK Wiltshire

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As part of the Swindon Falls Collaborative, through our Supportive Independence project, we support

people 65+ to become more active and better connected to their community. [Web link will be available in the next couple of weeks.]

We run three Fitness and Friendship Clubs in Swindon - Social clubs for older people with an emphasis on keeping active which are open to all older people who would like the opportunity to take part in activities and gentle exercise -

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/wiltshire/activities-and-events/fitness-and-friendship/>.

The Adult Social Care Team

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Telephone [01793 463333](tel:01793463333)

Support for Carers

If you look after an ill, frail or disabled family member, partner or friend then you are a carer. Swindon Carers Centre can help carers by making their caring role more manageable.

If you are an adult carer please call [01793 401090](tel:01793401090).

For young carers please call [01793 401091](tel:01793401091).

More information is available at [The Swindon Carers website](#)

NHS 111

111 is the NHS non-emergency number. It's fast, easy and free. Call [111](tel:111) to speak to a trained advisor supported by healthcare professionals. Alternatively you can visit <https://111.nhs.uk>

Rehabilitation

For further information on rehabilitation for Falls and Bone Health in Swindon, please contact the Community Rehabilitation Team, Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust on [01793 607710](tel:01793607710)

Swindon Community Hub

Sanford House brings together under one roof, a wealth of help, advice and information for the residents of Swindon. Located in Sanford Street in Swindon, it is a hub for a range of organisations including Citizen's Advice, the Carers Centre, Healthwatch Swindon and Swindon Mind. They provide information and advice face to face or by telephone on [01793 466633](tel:01793466633).

Healthwatch Swindon

Healthwatch Swindon is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services, there to make sure that people are put at the heart of care. Share your views, feedback, experiences and questions regarding health and social care with them. Visit www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk for more information.



Blackouts

Blackouts can be difficult to identify, particularly if they are brief, but they should be suspected if you cannot recall the fall and / or have injuries to your face, as this suggests you did not put your hands out to save yourself. Blackouts are very common and happen more often as we age. Common causes include:

- A drop in blood pressure when changing position (e.g. standing up from a chair)
- Heart disorders and problems with your heart rate for example bradycardia (slow heart rate), tachycardia (rapid heart rate) and atrial fibrillation (irregular heart rate)
- Anxiety / panic attacks / stress

If you think you may have had a blackout, it is important that you speak to your doctor so the cause can be investigated. Many of these conditions can be treated successfully.

[More Information](#)



Dizziness

Dizziness can occur for many reasons, e.g: a drop in blood pressure when changing position (e.g. standing up from a chair). If you feel dizzy when you first stand up:

- Change position slowly and exercise your arms & legs before rising.
- Sit back down again if you feel dizzy and wait until it passes.
- Stand still or walk on the spot when you first get up and don't rush.

Dehydration

Make sure you drink plenty of fluids during the day (6-8 cups per day). Drink regularly throughout the day, try to reduce caffeine and alcohol intake.

Inner ear disorders / vertigo

If you feel like the world is moving or spinning, or your dizziness is associated with nausea, vomiting, visual changes or hearing disturbances contact your doctor for further advice. Ensure you have had a hearing assessment recently.

Medications

Discuss your symptoms with a community pharmacist if you are taking medication, particularly medication related to blood pressure, if you have a medical condition (e.g. diabetes, COPD) consider whether your condition is well managed and discuss with a health professional if you need further advice.

Anxiety

Try some relaxation techniques such as mindfulness or deep breathing. Discuss with your doctor or health care professional if your worries/anxiety significantly impact your day to day living.

[More information](#)



Medication

If you are on 4 or more medications, the risk of falls increases even further.

It is important to have your medications reviewed regularly by your doctor or pharmacist so they can keep an eye on any falls risk increasing drugs, side effects and alter dosage if necessary. This is particularly important as we age as our sensitivity can increase and dosages need to be adjusted accordingly.

Make sure you are taking your medications as prescribed by your doctor. There may be specific instructions such as taking them at a certain time of day or on an empty stomach, that are important to the effectiveness of the medication. Check with your pharmacist if you plan on drinking alcohol or taking over the counter medication as these can have an effect on other medications you are taking.

[Help from a pharmacist](#)



Environment

Our surroundings can often cause us a risk. Often this is because of hazards within the home or difficulty with daily activities such as getting in or out of bed, on and off a chair or toilet, or in and out of the bath which can also cause falls.

Falls prevention in and around the home is often described as 'common sense', however, it isn't always easy to recognise the things that can cause trips, slips and falls.

Use our [home safety](#) section to help you identify and remove hazards within your home

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Warm & Safe Wiltshire

Ensure you keep your gas and electricity bills affordable and your home warm and safe with this free and impartial Council backed energy saving advice service. Call [0800 038 5722](tel:0800 038 5722) or see [The Warm and Safe Wiltshire Website](#) for more information

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Fire Service Safe & Well Assessment

Consider a free home fire safety check from the local fire service. Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service will visit your home, provide safety advice, install smoke, carbon monoxide and heat detectors where necessary and help you create an escape plan.

For more information and to request your free visit go to www.dwfire.org.uk/safety/safe-and-well-visits or telephone [0800 038 2323](tel:0800 038 2323)

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Movement and Exercise

Muscle weakness and poor balance are key risk factors for falls.

Between the ages of 50 and 70 we lose about 30% of our muscle strength and, as we age, our balance reaction times get slower which makes it harder to stay steady, especially if we are doing something quickly. Without physical activity, it is also difficult to maintain strong bones.

There is strong evidence that strength and balance exercise programmes are effective in preventing falls, regardless of age. Exercise classes designed for older people are particularly beneficial as they aim to improve balance and strength, making it easier to get in and out of chairs, on and off buses and up from and down to the floor.

Click [here](#) for some strength and balance exercises to get you started.

Generally speaking, physical activity is any movement that results in a small increase in your heart rate and breathing. Exercising is safe and beneficial for the majority of people, but, if you experience chest pain or feel faint while exercising you should stop exercising immediately and contact your doctor. To minimise the risk of adverse effects, if you are new to exercise, begin slowly and gradually build up to the recommended amount:

- Physical activity on most days adding up to 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise each week (e.g. walking, swimming, cycling)
- Strengthening exercises 2-3 times per week (e.g. gym, carrying heavy bags, yoga)
- Challenging balance activities 2-3 times per week (e.g. tai chi, bowls, dancing)

Something is better than nothing, even if it is just breaking up long periods of sitting with regular walks around the house or doing some exercises in your chair.

Please note that chair-based exercises, while beneficial for many other things, **DO NOT** prevent falls – exercises must challenge your balance, on your feet, if they are to be effective.

If you are already reasonably active, you still need to ensure your strength, balance and bone health is at its best. Tai Chi and any form of dancing are great activities to help your bones, muscles and balance.

If you need help or advice about the best activities for you, speak to a physiotherapist or appropriately qualified exercise professional.

For further information regarding community exercise opportunities for older people:

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Local Leisure

You can find information about local leisure centres and the accessible services they run in Swindon at www.better.org.uk/leisure-centre/swindon

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Physiotherapy

You can be referred to a physiotherapist by your GP, self-refer in some areas or find a local private physio at www.csp.org.uk/public-patient/find-physiotherapist

Walking football

Walking football Designed for the over 50's, the game is a wonderful way to get back into the sport or even try it for the first time. It is perfect for those who had previously given up playing football due to illness or injuries. Email lyndon.taylor@wiltshirefa.com or see www.wiltshirefa.com/players/ways-to-play/walking-football. Swindon Town FC Community Foundation also offer a range of activity programmes for older people - more information at www.stfcfoundation.com.

Step Out Swindon - Well Being Walks

This group of friendly volunteers provides a programme of free short walks from several locations across Swindon. All walks are weekly and last for about an hour, and they also offer a shorter mobility walk. Walks are varied and visit many of Swindon's beautiful green spaces. For more information, please telephone [07932 109209](tel:07932109209) or go to: <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/wellbeing-walks>



Vision

You may not notice that your vision is changing but, as we age we become less able to adapt to changes in light and darkness, to tell colours apart and to accurately see depth and distance. This can particularly cause problems with bifocals / varifocals, even if they have been worn for years so if you do wear this kind of lens, take care on steps, stairs and patterned or uneven surfaces.

The older we get, the more common eye conditions such as cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration become but, with 70% of visual problems being correctable, it is extremely important to ensure that you have regular eye tests. Remember that eye tests are free if you are 60 or over and many opticians can visit you at home if you are unable to go out and about.

Further information can be found here:

[Age UK eye health](#)

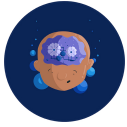
[Find an optician](#)

[Royal National Institute of Blind People](#)

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Memory

This may just be a gradual deterioration associated with ageing but can also be associated with stress, poor sleep, infection, certain medications, dementia and excessive consumption or withdrawal from drugs or alcohol.

If your memory issues are minor, you may find that keeping your brain active with puzzles & games or using visual prompts and lists as reminders can help. If memory problems are more significant they can impair judgement, reasoning and insight which can then result in taking risks which may lead to falls. The ability to recognise and interpret sight, sound and touch may also be affected which can lead to communication and movement difficulties. If you or your friends & family have noticed a change in your memory or behaviour, it is important that you discuss this with your doctor or other health care professional.

For further information follow the links below:

[NHS memory loss](#)

[Age UK Dementia](#)

[Swindon Borough Council](#)

[Swindon Dementia Care](#)

[Forget Me Not Centre](#)



Nutrition and Hydration

It is important to speak to your doctor or health care professional if you are losing weight for an unknown reason as it could be a sign of an underlying medical condition.

Poor nutrition can result in a weakened immune system, difficulty absorbing medication, impaired wound healing and a reduction in muscle and bone strength which may then lead to an increase in falls. Even if your weight is normal, if you are eating a limited range of foods, you could still be malnourished.

Good hydration is equally as important, as water makes up two thirds of our body and is vital to help digestion and flush out toxins. Being dehydrated can cause headaches, confusion, dizziness, constipation, urine infections, etc. which may all increase the risk of falls. Signs that you are not drinking enough can include feeling thirsty, headaches, tiredness, dry mouth / lips, confusion, dark / smelly urine, constipation.

If you are unsure if you are eating a balanced diet or drinking enough fluid, try keeping a food / drink diary and comparing it to the guidelines below. There are many reasons that your diet may be poor such as; small appetite, swallowing difficulties, difficulty sourcing or preparing food, illness and problems with dental health.

If you have difficulty shopping or preparing food, speak to family / friends who may be able to help or consider a meal or shopping delivery service. Contact Adult Social Care if you are having particular difficulties preparing meals and other daily activities as they may be able to help.

Try to eat a varied, balanced diet and maintain good hydration by eating / drinking:

- 2-3 portions of high protein foods every day such as meat, fish, eggs, nuts, beans, pulses, soya, tofu and other meat-free protein foods
- 2-3 portions of dairy foods every day such as cheese, milk and yoghurt or non-dairy alternatives like soya, almond or coconut milk
- 1 serving of starchy food at each meal (e.g. bread, cereals, potatoes, pasta or rice)
- At least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day (fresh, frozen, tinned, dried or juiced)
- If you enjoy fish, go for oily fish such as mackerel, salmon, herring, trout, pilchards or sardines as these are rich in omega-3 fatty acids. Aim for 2 portions a week
- At least 6-8 glasses/mugs of fluid every day - keep caffeine intake low as this can worsen dehydration

If you have diabetes please consult your doctor, health care professional or dietician before making any changes

Further information:

[NHS Eat well](#)

[Age UK Eating Healthy](#)

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Bone Health

Osteoporosis is a condition which makes your bones thinner, more brittle and increases the possibility of fracturing (breaking) a bone. It is more common in women due to bone loss occurring more rapidly after menopause.

The likelihood of having osteoporosis increases if you:

- Have ever broken a bone following a minor bump or fall (over the age of 50)
- Have a low BMI
- Have a family history of osteoporosis or hip fracture
- Are a current smoker or drink more than 3 units of alcohol per day
- Have taken oral corticosteroids (e.g. Prednisolone) for more than 3 months
- Have a diagnosis of Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Have Type I diabetes, untreated hyperthyroidism, chronic malnutrition/ malabsorption, chronic liver disease
- Have gone through a premature menopause (<45 years) without taking HRT

If you have broken a bone after a minor bump or fall and haven't discussed your bone health with another professional, it is important to see your doctor so that your bone health can be assessed. Diet and lifestyle changes can help to keep your bones as strong as possible, regardless of whether you have osteoporosis or not:

- Stop smoking as this can damage the bone building cells in your body
- Keep your alcohol intake low — excessive alcohol can destroy bones and make you unsteady
- Try to participate in some sort of weight bearing exercise

If you have not broken a bone before, exercise which encourages moderate impact such as jogging, jumping or stamping would be beneficial.

If you have had a previous fracture or are diagnosed with osteoporosis, The Royal Osteoporosis Society can guide you as to which exercises may be suitable for you. (Alternatively speak to your physiotherapist).

Ensure your Vitamin D intake is sufficient. We get most of our vitamin D from sunlight and most people in the UK get enough vitamin D by spending 15 minutes in the sun three times a week. It is recommended to take Vit D supplements, particularly over the winter months or if you do not go outdoors. These are available in supermarkets or pharmacies

Ensure you include plenty of calcium in your diet (1000mg a day)

[The Royal Osteoporosis Society](#)

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Feet

Trimming your toenails using a long-handled file after bathing, when they are softer, can make them easier to manage independently. If you struggle or have foot problems that you cannot manage yourself, a podiatrist or chiropodist can help. This is especially important if you have diabetes.

Know your 6 S's for safe footwear.....to know what to wear, and not wear, on your feet.

1. Supported heel: squeeze the heel cup and it should be firm and supportive, replace when worn.
2. Stable base: firm outer sole, wider than your heel, maximum heel height of 1.5 inches, grippy surface and with rounded edges.
3. Secure fixing: Velcro fixing to keep the shoe secure, and to provide adjustment if needed.
4. Sloppy slippers: backless and squishy slippers are the most common footwear worn by fallers in the home.
5. Socks: slippy and loose-fitting socks can also increase your risk of falls, compared to good.
6. Soles of your feet: walking barefoot is another risk for falls, wearing indoor shoes is more likely to keep you safe and on your feet.

Be aware: If you shuffle your feet when walking, shoes with a grippy outer sole may stick to the floor too much and actually increase your risk of falls.

If you have any doubts about what shoes to wear, seek advice from a Podiatrist.

For further information:

For more information contact the Swindon MSK Podiatry Team on [01793 607860](tel:01793607860) or email gwh.podiatryadmin@nhs.net

[NHS Find a podiatrist](#)



Bladder / Bowel

Some bladder and bowel problems can increase the risk of falls; these include:

- Rushing because of a strong urge to urinate
- Urine infections
- Passing urine more than 10 times in 24hrs
- Having to go to the toilet more than twice nightly
- Constipation - having hard bowel movements less than 3 times a week
- Diarrhoea - loose watery faeces that need to be passed urgently
- Difficulty accessing the toilet or adjusting your clothes

These issues can be made worse by not drinking enough and a high caffeine and / or alcohol intake. You can help to keep your bladder and bowel healthy by drinking 6 to 8 cups of fluid per day and minimising any drinks containing caffeine or alcohol. Eating a balanced diet with plenty of fibre e.g. wholegrain breads, cereals, and pasta, pulses and fruit and veg, can help to ease constipation. If you find it difficult getting to the toilet at night, a commode or urinal may be helpful. Speak to your doctor or a health care professional about a continence assessment if you are having on-going issues and require further support.

[NHS Pelvic floor exercises](#)

[Swindon Continence Service](#)

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Fear of Falling

The more worried you become, the less likely you are to keep active which, in turn, makes you more likely to fall again. You may find that you are more careful with your walking, start to slow down your pace or you begin to leave the house less often. These are very common responses and it may mean you've lost some of your confidence when getting around. It is important to remember that there are lots of things that you can do to reduce your risk of falling and improve your confidence. Working through the self-assessment tool on this website is a great start.

Having a falls plan in place can help to reduce anxiety and will reduce the likelihood of being on the floor for a long time.

If you are hurt or unable to get up:

- Summon help by using your pendant alarm (if you have one), calling out, crawling to a telephone or by banging on a wall
- Make sure there are blankets in each room so that you can keep warm
- Move to a softer surface if you are able
- Change position regularly if you are able

If you are unhurt and feel you can get up:

- Roll over onto your hands and knees
- Crawl to a stable piece of furniture such as an armchair and use this to assist you with getting up
- Turn and sit on a chair or bed and rest for a while

If you are worried about falling when you are alone at home, you might want to get a pendant alarm to enable you to call for help even if you can't reach the telephone.

There are also telecare sensors available such as falls detectors for people who would not be able to press a pendant alarm.

Remember

If you have had a fall, try not to worry about it too much. There are plenty of things you can do to minimise your risk of it happening again

If your worries are not going away, try talking to someone about it

Set yourself small goals to build back up to your usual activities – e.g. walk for a short distance first

Think about all the times you haven't fallen and try to maintain your usual levels of activity

Complete a [self-assessment plan](#)

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www.steadyonyourfeet.org