

Reducing your risk of falling

Practical information and exercises



**Marie
Curie**

* Calls are free from landlines and mobiles. Your call may be recorded for training and monitoring purposes.

Introduction

Anyone could have a fall. But the risk of falling can be reduced by doing some simple things and getting support from your healthcare team, family, friends or carers. This guide is for you and them. It explains how different things can affect your risk of falling and gives practical tips to help you stay safe and avoid falls. By reading this booklet, we hope you feel more confident about reducing your risk of falling.

If you're worried about falling or have any questions, speak to your healthcare team.



If you need more information or extra support, you can call the free Marie Curie Support Line on **0800 090 2309***, email **support@mariecurie.org.uk** or see page 22-25.

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Who is at risk of falling?

You may be more likely to fall if you:

- have a history of falls
- find it hard to remember things, concentrate, learn new things or have other cognitive issues
- have poor balance or mobility
- have sight loss or eye conditions
- are taking more than one type of medication or a new medication – your healthcare team can go over these with you
- not having control over your bowel or bladder (incontinence).

Other things that can make you more likely to fall include:

- being in a new, unfamiliar environment – for example, if you're staying in a hospice or hospital
- not feeling confident in moving around
- having a fear of falling.

How falling might affect you

Falls do not always cause serious injury. But some falls can cause broken bones and other injuries. Having a fall might also mean that you lose confidence. Try to remember that falling is not a failure, and you can still be as independent as possible.

Some people have a fear of falling, even if they've never fallen before. You might feel this way because of your illness or for another reason. It might help to talk to your healthcare team about any worries, so they can reassure you. We hope the information in this booklet will also give you some more confidence.



Ways to reduce your risk of falling

In this section, we explain different things you can do to reduce your risk of falling.

Making the space around you safe

- Keep the space around you tidy and remove things that you could trip over (see page 6). Make sure there are clear pathways indoors and outdoors to move around easily.
- Ask for an occupational therapist to do an assessment of your home or the place you're staying. They can advise on any adaptations or equipment you might need, including handrails or grab rails. See page 17 for more information about occupational therapists and physiotherapists.
- If you live at home, make sure it's well-lit so you can see where you're going, especially at night. Use nightlights in hallways and bedrooms. These might be lights that turn on automatically when you move (motion sensor), low level lights that are always on, or traditional ceiling or wall lights.

“Along the way, we had tremendous support from Marie Curie. We had an occupational therapist and physiotherapist visit our home on several occasions. I think, without their support, Alan would not have had the quality of care he deserved.”

Hazel, who cared for Alan after his MND diagnosis

Watch out for trip hazards

- Look out for things like rugs, shoes, or furniture that sticks out that you could trip on. Try to secure them or remove them from where you walk.
- Keep things you use often within easy reach, so you do not have to stretch or bend too much. Avoid reaching for things that are too high or low.
- If you use medical equipment, such as a portable oxygen cylinder, be mindful of tubes or wires.
- If you have pets, be careful of them and their toys. Make sure they do not get in your way when you're walking. Keep their toys and other items organised and out of walkways. Baskets or storage boxes could help with this.

Wear the right shoes or slippers

It's important to wear shoes, slippers or other footwear options that fit well and have good grip. You should wear them whenever you're moving around. Ideally, shoes or slippers you wear should:

- be fitted correctly – checking the width, length and depth
- be fastened onto the foot – for example, with a velcro strap
- have round toes
- have a low, wide heel
- have a high back (not be slip on shoes or slippers)
- have a cushioned, non-slip sole to prevent slipping.

Avoid:

- high heels or loose slippers that can increase the risk of falls
- slip on shoes
- worn out shoes or slippers – they may be comfy, but they might not be as secure on your foot and may have less grip.

Wear the right clothes

- Choose comfortable clothes that do not get in the way when you move around.
- Try not to wear long, flowing clothes. These might catch on things and cause you to trip.

Look after your body and health

- Get regular eye check-ups to ensure your vision is clear. Poor eyesight can increase the risk of falls. If you need glasses, make sure you wear them as prescribed.
- Have your hearing checked regularly. Good hearing can help you be aware of your surroundings and any potential hazards. This might include pets in the home, or bikes and cars outside.
- Take care of your feet. Trim your toenails regularly and wear well-fitting shoes that provide support and comfort. If you have foot problems, such as pain or numbness, ask a healthcare professional for guidance.

Reducing your risk of falling

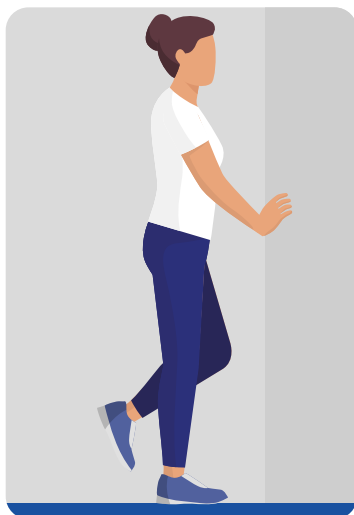
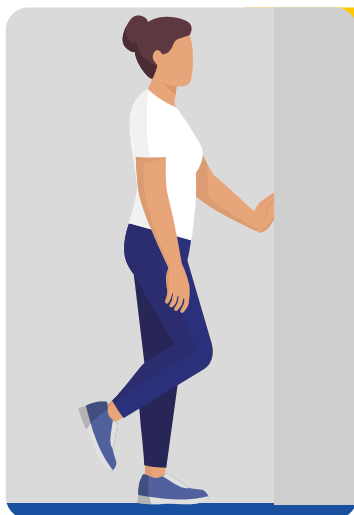
- Eating a healthy diet with foods that give you strong bones and muscles can help prevent falls. Foods like milk, leafy greens, and fish can be good choices. Check with your healthcare team about foods that are suitable for your condition.
- Drink enough water to stay hydrated. Being dehydrated can affect your balance.

Balance exercises

Improving your balance can help prevent falls. There are exercises that can help you do this.

It's a good idea to check with your healthcare team before doing any balance exercises. They can help find exercises that are suitable for you.

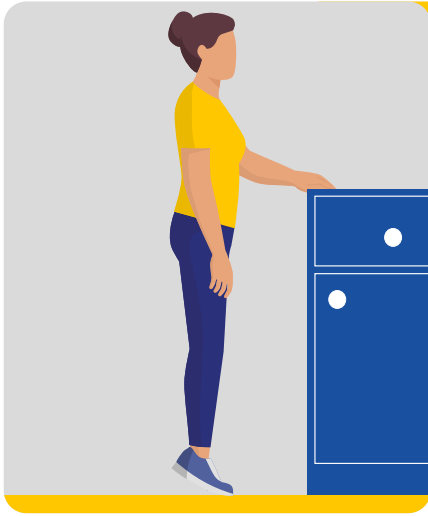
Balance exercise one



One-leg stand

- Stand near a wall, or furniture that's strong enough to hold your weight, for support.
- Lift one leg off the ground, bending it at the knee.
- Try to balance for up to 10 seconds.
- Repeat on the other leg.
- Aim to do this three or four times on each leg.

Balance exercise two



Heel raises

- Hold onto furniture or a worktop strong enough to hold your weight, for support.
- Lift both heels off the floor slowly. You do not have to lift them far – just as much as you can manage.
- Slowly lower your heels back to the floor.
- Aim to do this three or four times.

Balance exercise three



Heel-to-toe standing

- You may want to hold onto the back of a chair that's strong enough to hold your weight for support.
- Place one foot in front of the other. The toe of the foot behind should touch the heel of the foot in front.
- Try to hold this position for up to 10 seconds.
- Change position so your other foot is in front.
- Try to hold this position for up to 10 seconds.

How to get up after a fall

If you fall, try to stay calm. Check if you're hurt before trying to move.

Here are some different ways you may be able to get up after a fall. You might want to practice these when someone's with you.

Crawl on your hands and knees



- If you can, roll onto your side



- Push up onto your elbows. If that feels OK, push up again to your hands and knees.
- Use your arms to crawl to something sturdy.
- Take a rest for a moment.

How to get up after a fall



- Hold onto a chair or bed for support. Slide your stronger leg forward, so you end up with one foot flat on the floor.
- Still holding onto the chair or bed, lean forward and push up. Use your arms and your stronger leg to bear your weight.



- Once you are standing, turn around and sit down. You can rest until you feel able to contact someone, or start moving around again.

Roll or shuffle

If you cannot get onto your hands and knees, try this.



- Roll or shuffle on your bottom to a surface close to the floor. This could be a sofa or the bottom step of the stairs.



- Sit with your back to it. If you can, bend your knees so that your feet are flat on the floor.
- Put your arms behind you and your hands on the surface.



- Push up with your arms and feet, so you can sit on the surface.
- You can rest until you feel able to contact someone, or have enough strength to stand up and start moving around again.

What to do if you fall and cannot get up

- If you cannot get up or you're in pain, call for help. If you have a device that alerts others, use it or a phone, if you have one nearby.
- Try to stay warm and comfortable while you wait for help. You can use pillows or cushions for support, if you have any close to you.



Feeling confident after a fall

Falling can be upsetting and make you feel shaken. Here are some ways to help rebuild your confidence.

Accepting your emotions

It's common to feel upset, anxious, or even embarrassed after a fall. Let yourself feel these emotions and try to remind yourself that it's a natural way to feel after a shock.

Be kind to yourself. Give yourself permission to process your feelings and understand that it may take time to regain your confidence.

Getting emotional support

If you feel able to, let the people close to you know how you're feeling. Talking openly can give you comfort and reassurance.

Or you could join an in-person or online support group. It could give you a space to connect with others who have fallen and help you feel less alone.



Marie Curie's Online Community offers a safe space to share experiences and tips. Visit community.mariecurie.org.uk

Working with your healthcare team

Talk to your healthcare team about the fall and any worries you have. They can:

- check whether the fall has affected you physically
- refer you to a physiotherapist, occupational therapist, or both – they can assess you and suggest suitable exercises, home adaptations or equipment (see below)
- support you as you work through your feelings
- offer tips and guidance to prevent future falls.

Adapting your home

You may be able to adapt your home, or the place you're staying, so you feel more confident moving around. An occupational therapist can make recommendations suitable for you. These might include:

- getting a personal alarm that can alert people if you've fallen – your healthcare team can tell you whether it'll be free or you'll need to pay for it, depending on where you live
- installing handrails or grab rails in the bathroom or other areas
- improving lighting in areas you walk around often.

The organisations on pages 24-25 also have information about what might be helpful.

Focusing on your progress

It's not always easy, but try not to focus on the fall. Instead, focus on your recovery – the progress you're making, however small it might seem to begin with. This might be some of the things we've covered, like speaking with your healthcare team or reaching out to those close to you. It might help to keep a note of your progress, so you can see how you're improving.

Remember that getting back your confidence after a fall may need patience, self-care and support from others.

“Marietta started coming to visit my Dad, and she would go out with him round the block. Dad can't go out on his own, as he's at risk of falling. She really keeps his spirits up and is part of a team that keeps my Dad going.”

Mandy and her Dad, who got support from a Marie Curie Companion volunteer

Helping someone who has fallen

If you are a family member, friend, or carer of someone with a terminal illness, it's important to know what to do if they fall.

Falls can be upsetting for the person who's fallen and for you. Try to remember that falls can happen even with the best safety measures in place. But by being prepared and knowing what to do, you can better support them.

It's a good idea to ask the person's healthcare team for specific guidance based on their condition and situation.

It's important to be aware of your own risk of falling and injury when helping someone else. If you feel less stable, have problems with mobility, or have any concerns, it is better to wait for someone else to help someone who's fallen.

Reducing your risk of falling

Here are some tips on what to do if the person you're supporting has a fall.

If you are with them when they fall

1. Stay calm and reassure them. Encourage them to take deep breaths and remain still for a moment to assess any injuries.
2. Check whether there's anything that makes the space unsafe. If there are any hazards, such as objects or furniture in the way, remove them carefully to reduce the risk of further injury.
3. If they can communicate and tell you they are not in pain, encourage them to try and get up slowly with your assistance. You could move a sturdy object, like a stool or chair that's strong enough to hold their weight, for them to hold onto.
4. Help them find a stable position. This could be sitting on a chair, bed or the floor.
5. Stay with the person until more help arrives or until they feel OK. Try to reassure them, as well as helping them keep warm, comfortable and hydrated.

If the person is unable to get up, in pain, or shows signs of injury, it's important to get medical help. Call **999** for an ambulance and immediate assistance.

If you are not with them when they fall

- If you're alerted that someone has fallen, try to stay calm. Find out how they are and, if you can get in contact, reassure them.
- If the person can communicate and does not appear to be seriously injured, guide them through the steps mentioned on page 20. Encourage them to try and get up slowly. If someone else is with them, they might be able to assist them.
- If they are not able to get up or are in pain, tell them to call for help. This could mean ending their contact with you to call someone else, shouting to attract attention, or using any device they have that will alert help.
- If they are alone and unable to call for help, you could call **999** or another emergency contact on their behalf.
- If you can, try to get to them as soon as possible.

Supporting someone after a fall

After a fall, the person's confidence might be shaken – and you might also be worried about them falling again.

You could work through the suggestions on page 16-18 together. You can also speak to their healthcare team, or other support organisations, about what might reduce the risk of them having another fall.

Try to remember that someone falling is not your fault. It can happen even with all the 'right' safety measures in place. What's important is that you can both make progress to get your confidence back.

How Marie Curie can help

Marie Curie is here for anyone with an illness they're likely to die from, and those close to them. Whatever the illness, wherever you are, we're with you to the end.

Marie Curie Support Line

0800 090 2309*

Our free Support Line is for anyone with an illness they're likely to die from and those close to them. Our team, including nurses and specialist Energy Support Officers, offers practical and emotional support on everything from symptom management and day-to-day care to financial information and bereavement support. Our Support Line is available in over 200 languages, or via webchat at mariecurie.org.uk/support Open between 8am to 6pm from Monday to Friday, and 11am to 5pm on Saturday.

Marie Curie Companions

Companion volunteers focus on what's important to you and those close to you. It might be accompanying you to appointments, being there to listen to how you're feeling without judgment, or stepping in so family or carers can take a break. Companions provide the emotional and practical support you want - at home, in hospital or over the phone. mariecurie.org.uk/companions

Marie Curie Telephone Bereavement Service

Get ongoing bereavement support over the phone from the same volunteer. You can access up to six sessions of 45 minutes. We can help if your bereavement was expected, happened recently or was some time ago.

mariecurie.org.uk/bereavement

Marie Curie Online Community

Our Online Community is a space for you to share thoughts, feelings and experiences. It's moderated by the Marie Curie Support Line team, who can also help answer your questions. community.mariecurie.org.uk

Marie Curie Hospice care where it's needed

Our hospices

Our hospices help people with any illness they're likely to die from, and the people close to them, receive the support they need. From medical and physical support to psychological and emotional care, whatever your illness, at whatever stage of the journey, we help you to live the best life possible, right to the end. mariecurie.org.uk/hospices

Hospice care at home

Our nurses, healthcare assistants and other healthcare professionals bring the clinical, practical and emotional help you need to you, in the comfort of your own home. And we offer support to the people close to you too - from reassurance and practical information to letting them take a break. mariecurie.org.uk/nurses

Looking for more information? If you found this booklet useful, we have free information online at mariecurie.org.uk/support or to order at mariecurie.org.uk/publications

Useful organisations

Age Co (owned by Age UK)

personalalarms.ageco.co.uk/pages/preventing-falls

Hosts a free Falls Risk Score online tool that assesses your risk of falling.

British Red Cross

Support line: **0808 196 3651**

Wheelchair hire: **0300 456 1914**

redcross.org.uk

Loans wheelchairs and toilet aids to people around the UK.

Care & Repair Cymru

National Office number: **029 2010 7580**

careandrepair.org.uk

Offers help with DIY jobs around the home if you're based in Wales.

Care and Repair Scotland

Office number: **0141 221 9879**

careandrepairsotland.co.uk

Offers personal, financial and technical advice and support to people needing to improve or adapt a home.

Foundations

Office number: **0300 124 0315**

foundations.uk.com

Oversees a network of Home Improvement Agencies and handyperson providers in England.

Living Made Easy

Helpline: **0300 123 3084**

Email: **info@dlf.org.uk**

livingmadeeasy.org.uk

Provides free, impartial advice and information about home adaptations, mobility aids and other equipment.

NHS

nhs.uk/conditions/falls

Has information about reducing your risk of falling and what to do if you fall.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

General: **03448 920 900**

Housing Benefit queries: **03448 920 902**

Repairs: **03448 920 901**

Email: **information@nihe.gov.uk**

nihe.gov.uk

The Housing Executive provides help and advice with adapting your home and housing benefits in Northern Ireland.

Marie Curie

Marie Curie is the UK's leading end of life charity. Whatever the illness, wherever you are, we're with you to the end.

0800 090 2309*

Marie Curie provides free support over the phone in over 200 languages, and via webchat, to anyone with an illness they're likely to die from and those close to them.

Our team, including nurses and specialist Energy Support Officers, offers practical and emotional support on everything from symptom management and day-to-day care to financial information and bereavement support. Visit mariecurie.org.uk/support

We also have an Online Community where you can share thoughts, feelings and experiences at community.mariecurie.org.uk

We can't do it without you

Our free information and support services are entirely funded by your generous donations. Thanks to you, we can continue to offer people what they need, when they need it.

To donate, visit mariecurie.org.uk/donate

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