

## Falls factsheet

For those living in a care setting  
(residential home/supported living)

### Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net).

This information is to help keep you safe, well and where possible, maintain your independence in your care setting, by helping you to prevent falls and accidents. Falls and accidents are more common as people get older and many older people experience them each year. Remember that accepting small changes may help you to avoid a fall and keep safe. Always tell a member of care staff, relative or other health professional if you have a fall – they may be able to help you reduce your risk of having another one.

Sometimes a fall can affect your confidence and make you afraid of falling again. If you do have a fear of falling it is good to discuss this with a care assistant or relative, so they can make sure your care provider is aware.

You can reduce the risk of falls, accidents and injuries by:

- Taking time to look through this factsheet which offers information to keep you safe and well
- Discussing the safety suggestions with a relative or care assistant

## Are you safe in your care setting?

### Reduce risks in your own room in your care setting

#### Common hazards:

**Floor coverings:** Floor coverings in your room should be non-slip and if worn or damaged, should be replaced or repaired by your care provider. **Tape down edges of loose rugs or remove them.** Ask a care assistant to mop up spills straight away. Your care provider is responsible for floor covering and maintenance within the communal areas of your care setting.

**Out of reach items:** Ask your care assistant to put items you use most often in places that are easy to reach. Discuss reaching aids with a relative or care assistant to see if they would be appropriate to help with this.

**Handrails:** Would it help to have a handrail fitted in your room to assist your balance or safety? If yes, discuss this with a relative or your care assistant. Your care provider should ensure that handrails are securely fitted in appropriate places throughout the communal areas you use within the setting.

**Position and height of furniture:** Ensure that furniture is arranged so that you can move around easily. Keep walkways clear of furniture. Consider removing castors from moveable furniture. A health professional can arrange for height of furniture to be checked and altered as appropriate.

**Temperature:** Is your room a suitable temperature for you to feel comfortable but not make you drowsy? If no, discuss this with your relative or care assistant so that they can address the problem. Your care provider should ensure that the temperature is suitable within communal areas of your care setting.

**Lighting:** Do you have adequate lighting in your room that you are able to reach and use? Always turn your lights on when light levels are low. Report any faulty lighting or broken bulbs to your care assistant or care provider.

**Tripping hazards:** Keep your room free of clutter e.g. make sure there are no trailing flexes, clothes or other objects on the floor that could cause you to trip. Also be sure that your furniture leaves enough room for you to move about safely, especially if you use a walking aid. Your care provider should ensure that communal areas are free of clutter or hazards.

**Clothing and footwear:** Avoid clothes which are too long or ill fitting (e.g. that slide down and/or get under your feet, causing a trip hazard). Also make sure that slippers and shoes are well fitting and in good condition. Avoid high heels, backless (mules) and unsupportive shoes.

**Bathing and personal hygiene:** If you feel unsteady, or are beginning to have difficulty with any area of personal hygiene, discuss this with a relative or care assistant. It may be that you would benefit from equipment to help you continue to do this independently or some assistance to perform these tasks. Avoid spilling water or using oils or talc as these can cause the floor to be slippery. Your care provider should help you sort this out once they are aware.

**Bedroom and dressing:** Make sure the bedspread or duvet is not too long and avoid trailing night clothes. Make sure you can reach essential night-time items from your bed (e.g. mobility aids, alarm bell). Sit when dressing rather than standing on one leg. If you feel unsteady or are beginning to have difficulty with getting dressed/undressed, discuss this with a relative or care assistant. Appropriate equipment or daily assistance may help to keep you safe and able. Your care provider should help you sort this out once they are aware.

**Bedroom lighting:** Have a bedside lamp with an easily reached switch, or torch by the bed. Always switch on a light before getting out of bed. Consider fitting nightlights, which can be plugged into spare sockets in the room to give a constant low level of light all the time. If night care assistance is available, always call for help if you feel you need it.

**Electric sockets:** Do not overload electric sockets in your room. If plugs look brown or wires are frayed, stop using them and ask your care provider to repair or replace them immediately.

**Kitchen equipment:** If you use cooking facilities, keep saucepan handles turned away from you, work surfaces around the cooker tidy and have plenty of space when handling hot food or liquids. Never leave pans unattended and remember to turn off the cooker when finished. If you feel you would benefit from a perching stool to aid balance, discuss this with a relative or care assistant.

**Kettle:** If you use a kettle, always unplug before filling it. Consider a cordless kettle or use a jug to fill your kettle. Only boil as much water as you need as this will keep it light for lifting.

## Keeping well and safe at home

### Your general health

#### Have you had an eyesight test in the past year?

Your care provider should make sure you see the optician for regular eye tests, at least every two years. Eyesight checks are free to the over 60's. If you notice any change in your sight, tell a care assistant or relative as soon as possible. Clean your glasses regularly or ask a care assistant to do this for you.

#### Do your feet require attention?

Your care provider should make sure you have regular nail care and see a chiropodist regularly if you need to. If your feet have new or worsening swelling, pain or injury, tell a care assistant or relative immediately.

#### Winter flu jabs?

Your care provider should ensure that you have a flu jab annually, unless you express your wish not to.

#### Do you get enough exercise?

It is very important to keep active. Your care provider should give you opportunities to have regular exercise to improve your strength, circulation, balance and general fitness unless you express your wish not to.

#### Do you have a family history of osteoporosis (brittle bones)?

Bones get thinner with age, so your diet should be varied and include lots of calcium and vitamin D. Whether you, or your care provider are responsible for your meal provision, milk, dairy-products, meat, fish, cereals, fruit and vegetables should all be included. Daylight is a source of vitamin D, so get out when you can. Your care provider should enable you to do this regularly if you are unable to do so by yourself.

### Your mobility

#### Have you fallen in the past six months?

If the cause was a hazard in your room or a communal area in your care setting, has it been removed or repaired?

#### Do you have weak muscles, balance problems or stiff joints or have difficulty getting in or out of a chair or the bath?

Physiotherapy or occupational therapy may help as there may be exercises or simple pieces of equipment that might help you. Your care provider or relative will need to speak with your GP to arrange this for you.

#### Do you have difficulty walking?

Your care provider should ensure walking aids are suitable for your needs and check your equipment for signs of wear and tear regularly. If your needs change, they can arrange for you to be assessed by a physiotherapist as described above.

## Balance and dizziness

### Do you get dizzy or light headed?

Pause when getting out of bed or up from a chair. Try moving your arms and legs a few times. If symptoms of dizziness are severe or come on suddenly, tell your care assistant as your blood pressure may need checking.

## Medicines

If you are 75 or over, your medicines should be reviewed by your doctor every 12 months (or every six months if you are taking four or more medicines). If you have not had a review, ask your care provider to organise this for you.

## Your wellbeing

If you **regularly** have trouble sleeping **or** become confused / forgetful, tell a relative or care assistant. In some cases there may be a reason that your GP can identify and treat.

## Falls are no laughing matter, they can lead to...

Injury, reduced quality of life, reduced mobility and loss of independence.

### You are more at risk of a fall if you:

- have fallen before
- have a fear of falling
- take 4 or more medicines
- have had a stroke or have Parkinson's disease
- have a problem with your balance
- have difficulty getting up from a dining chair without using your arms.

If you have a fall in your care setting, raise the alarm in any way you can; press/pull the call bell or alarm, shout or bang with your stick/walking aid, get to the phone if you can. Then rest and wait. If needed, repeat for a few minutes then rest and wait. In a care setting, help will arrive soon, but continue to raise the alarm until it does.

## PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## Have your say

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

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