

**Falls can be prevented.
Take action to stay
mobile and independent.**

**STAY ON
YOUR FEET®**



Additional Stay On Your Feet® information can be viewed online at
www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/stayonyourfeet

Information has been adapted from the Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care (2009). 'Preventing falls and harm from falls in older people. Best practice guidelines for Australian community care, hospitals and residential aged care'.

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www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/stayonyourfeet
Department of Health and Human Services



Yes, you can reduce your risk of falling

Staying mobile and independent is an important part of healthy ageing. Falls and their associated injuries are a serious health issue and are the leading cause of injury hospitalisation for older people. The good news is that taking some simple and effective steps outlined in this booklet can prevent most falls and the injuries they incur.



Falls are not a normal part of ageing

Many people may not see falls as an important issue because they feel it is just a 'sign of getting older' and that it is inevitable. Those who see falls as an 'expected' part of ageing may not realise that just like any other potential injury, there are things that can be done to reduce the likelihood of a fall. Understanding that falls can happen to anyone, whatever their age, helps everyone to take falls seriously and to find ways to prevent falls.



Acknowledgments

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- Tasmanian Hospital Organisations – Clinicians
- Department of Health WA, Falls Prevention Health Network
- Department of Health WA, North Metropolitan Area Health Service, South Metropolitan Area Health Service
- Silver Chain
- Armadale Home Help
- Injury Control Council Western Australia
- Health Consumer's Council Western Australia.

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Falls prevention is about realising that you can influence your own mobility and independence. Being active and independent is extremely important when it comes to enjoying your life and contributing to your community.

Many people believe that tripping, slipping or 'not being careful' causes falls. But the fact is that most falls are caused by personal issues – something to do with a person's lifestyle, physical or mental state – or by interaction between one or more of these factors and an environmental hazard.



Nine Steps to Stay On Your Feet®

This booklet provides information and suggestions in nine key steps. These are the Nine Steps to Stay On Your Feet®, and they reflect the main factors that contribute to falls. You need to review all the steps to Stay On Your Feet® – but focus on those parts that relate to you, your lifestyle, independence and environment.

Take positive steps to stay mobile and independent. Don't put off considering your risk of falling until you have had an injury or scare. Do it today and you can prevent falls before they happen.



Dietitians Association of Australia 1800 812 942
www.daa.asn.au

Falls Prevention Information Activities and Resources

Launceston Community Health Centre (North) (03) 6336 5155
North West Regional Hospital (Physio) (03) 6493 6250
Mersey Community Hospital (Physio) (03) 6478 5325
Community Allied Health Services (South) (03) 6222 7280

Independent Living Centre 1300 885 886
www.ilctas.asn.au

Macular Degeneration Foundation 1800 111 709
www.mdfoundation.com.au

MedicineWise 1300 633 424
www.nps.org.au

National Continence Hotline 1800 330 066
www.continence.org.au

National Stroke Foundation 1800 787 653
www.strokefoundation.com.au

Occupational Therapy Australia (Tas) 1300 682 878
www.otaus.com.au/divisions/tas

Optometrists Association (Tas) (03) 6224 3360
www.optometrists.asn.au

Osteoporosis Australia 1800 242 141
www.osteoporosis.org.au

Parkinson's Disease (Tas) 1800 644 183
www.parkinsons.org.au

Tasmanian Community Care Referral Service 1300 769 699
www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/service_information/service_delivery_points/tccrs

The Heart Foundation 1300 362 787
www.heartfoundation.org.au

Vision Australia 1300 847 466
www.visionaustralia.org.au

Contact Details

Alzheimers Australia	1800 100 500 www.fightdementia.org.au/tasmania.aspx
Arthritis Foundation of Tasmania	1800 011 041 www.arthritistas.org.au
Australian Association of Social Workers (Tas)	(03) 6224 5833 www.aasw.asn.au
Australian Physiotherapy Association (Vic/Tas)	1300 306 622 www.physiotherapy.asn.au
Australian Podiatry Association Tasmania	(03) 6344 2613 www.taspod.com
Australian Psychological Society	1800 333 497 www.psychology.org.au
Australian Red Cross (Tas)	1800 246 850 www.redcross.org.au
Beyond Blue	1300 224 636 www.beyondblue.org.au
Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) Veterans' Home Front services	www.dva.gov.au 1800 801 945
Commonwealth Respite and Carelink www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/programmes-services/for-carers/ commonwealth-respite-and-carelink-centres	1800 052 222
Community Rehabilitation Unit (Hobart)	6166 7312
Council on the Ageing (COTA Tas)	(03) 6231 3265 www.cotatas.org.au
Diabetes Tasmania	1300 136 588 www.diabetestas.org.au

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Step 1

Be Active

Taking part in physical activity is the best thing you can do to reduce your risk of falling. There are many benefits to being physically active including:

- Keeping leg muscles strong.
- Improving bone strength and slowing osteoporosis.
- Improving balance, co-ordination and walking.
- Maintaining flexible joints.
- Keeping your heart strong.
- Increased mental well being.
- Confidence to perform everyday activities.

There are a number of ways you can be active. If you are at high risk of falling, customised strength and balance exercises prescribed specifically for you are recommended, for example from a Physiotherapist. Other forms of physical activity which you can take part in regularly include walking, tai chi, hydrotherapy, swimming, gardening or housework.

It is important for you to keep doing your everyday activities to make sure you Stay On Your Feet®.



My Aged Care

The aim of My Aged Care is to help you stay at home by connecting you to a range of basic support and maintenance services such as cleaning, gardening, personal care, community support and transport.

My Aged Care focusses on persons 65+ years old or 50+ years old who identify as an **Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander**.
1800 200 422

Tasmanian Community Care Referral Service

Tasmanian Community Care Referral Service (TCCRS) aims to help you stay at home by connecting you to a range of home and community services. TCCRS focusses on persons under 65 years old or under 50 years old who identify as an **Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander**. **1300 769 699**

Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA)

To check if you are eligible for DVA falls prevention services call: **Veterans' Home and Garden Maintenance 1300 550 450**





Concerns about falling can lead to:

- Loss of confidence.
- Depression.
- Reduction in both physical and social activities.
- Increased risk of falls.
- Risk of nursing home admission.

If you have concerns about falling, speak to your GP or a health professional. They will be able to refer you to services in your region which can provide Falls Prevention information, activities and resources or to an Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT).

Falls Prevention Activities and Resources

Falls prevention information, activities and resources are available at hospitals and community health services.

Regional contacts

Launceston Community Health Centre
(03) 6336 5155

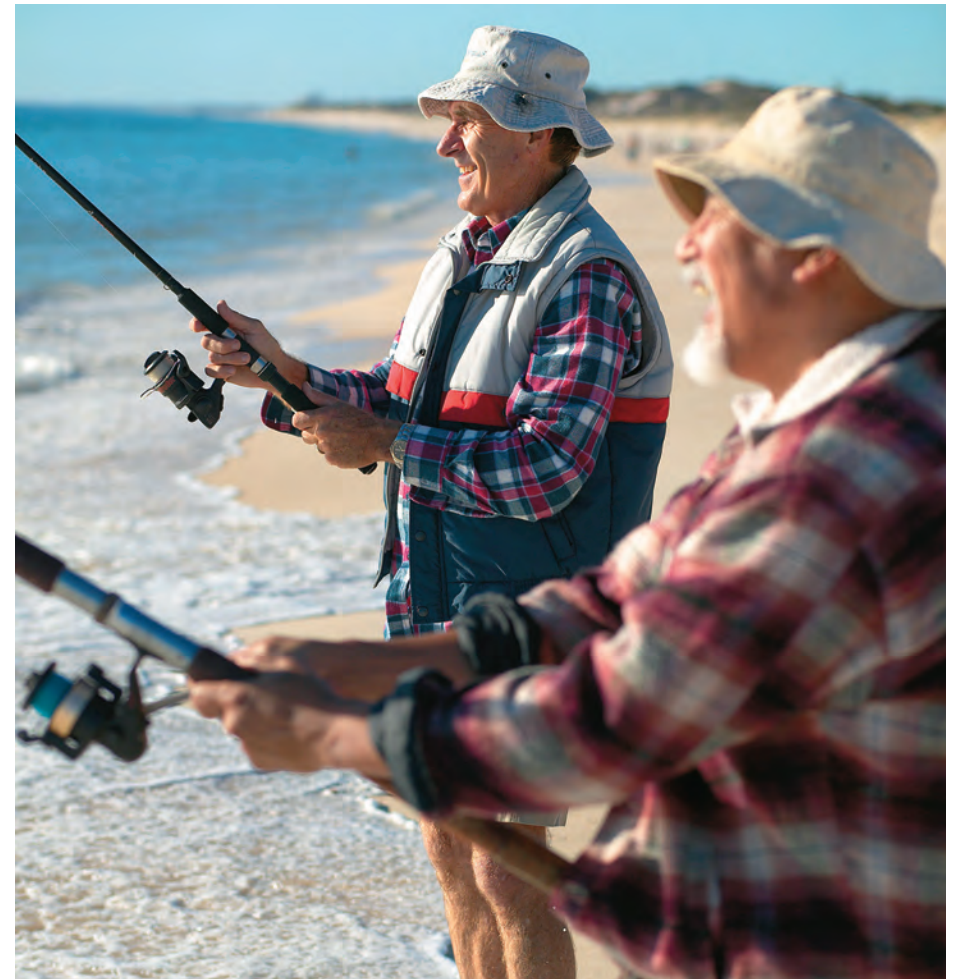
North West Regional Hospital (Physio)
(03) 6493 6250

Mersey Community Hospital (Physio)
(03) 6478 5325

Community Allied Health
Services (South) (03) 6222 7280

Simple tasks such as walking to your letterbox to collect your mail can help you to keep mobile.

If you notice that everyday activities such as bathing, dressing, getting out of bed or a chair are difficult, or you feel unsteady on your feet or are not confident while walking, speak to your local health professional. For example, a Physiotherapist will be able to provide you with exercises to help you with your strength, coordination and balance. It is also important to have a medical check up and talk to your General Practitioner (GP) before beginning any new physical activity.



Step 2

Manage Your Medicines

Medicines can be obtained from a number of different health professionals including GPs, Pharmacists, Dentists, Nurses, Naturopaths, Homeopaths and Herbalists.



All medicines have possible side effects. Side effects may also occur when medicines are combined together. Alcohol can also interact with your medications and cause unwanted side effects. Taking four or more medicines can place you at a greater risk of falling. Possible side effects to look out for include:

- drowsiness
- dizziness
- light headedness
- unsteadiness
- blurred or double vision
- difficulty thinking clearly.

Write down if you notice any of these symptoms and talk to your GP or Pharmacist as soon as possible.

It is important for you to take an active role in managing your medicines. Talk to your GP and write a list of all the medicines you are taking and why you are taking them. Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) pamphlets are available from your pharmacy for each medicine you take to help you understand your medicines and any side effects that may occur.

For more information on this service, please see page 26 for contact details.

Getting up off the floor

It is important to remember to stay calm if you have a fall. Check your body to see if you are injured.

If you are not injured and can get up:

- Use sturdy furniture to support yourself.
- Seek medical help if you need it and tell someone you have fallen.

If you cannot get up:

- Do not panic.
- Raise the alarm using one of the approaches in your Falls Action Plan.
- Make a loud noise if you cannot raise the alarm.
- Try to stay warm and make yourself as comfortable as possible until help arrives.
- Move around gently to stop one part of your body from being put under too much pressure.

Concerns about falling

Concerns about falling can become a serious issue when they restrict your ability to take part in daily activities which you are able to perform. If you do not continue taking part in daily activities, this may lead to a loss of strength and movement in your legs as well as causing you to feel isolated. It is alright to have some concerns about falling as these can also act in a protective way by stopping you from taking part in activities with a high risk of falling and chance of injury.



Falls Action Plan

Having a personal Falls Action Plan can help you to prepare yourself in the event of a fall. It can also give you more confidence in preventing falls or dealing with a fall after it has happened. It is important to have some means of calling for assistance in case of an emergency. Having a personal alarm or keeping a mobile or cordless phone on you at all times is helpful. Ensuring a family member or neighbour has a spare key will also allow people to access you quickly.



Personal alarms

A personal alarm may be useful to call for help if you have a fall. The alarm works by pushing a button on a pendant worn around your neck or wrist in an emergency. Your nominated person to call is then contacted. Speak to your GP or contact Australian Red Cross (1800 246 850) or Tasmanian Care Point (1300 769 699) for more information on pendant personal alarms.

If you are living alone, it is important to let someone know when you are feeling unwell or if you have a fear of falling. This can be your GP, family, friends, or even your neighbour. Having someone who calls you everyday to check if you are alright is also helpful.

If you do not have anyone who can assist you in an emergency, the Red Cross offers a service known as Telecross where a trained volunteer will provide you with a reassuring phone call everyday.



Always consult with your GP or Pharmacist before taking any new medicines including those purchased over the counter e.g. Panadol. Any medicine which your GP has told you not to take anymore or is past its use by date should be returned to your Pharmacist for disposal. It is also important that you should only take prescription medicines that have been prescribed for you.

Getting your medicines reviewed regularly will help you to make sure that you are taking the right medicines in their correct dosages and at the right time. A Home Medicines Review is a joint service provided by your GP and a Pharmacist which allows a thorough check of all the medicines you are taking. Your GP can advise you about a Home Medicines Review and refer you to a Pharmacist.

If you have difficulty taking your medicines due to a physical disability or memory issues, a dosage box can help you to safely take your medicines. A dosage box helps you to separate your medicines into the times and days when you need to use them. If you are unable to do this yourself, a Pharmacist can prepare this for you.

Step 3

Manage Your Health

By managing your health conditions you can help to reduce your risk of having a fall. A regular check up with your GP is important so you can discuss any new changes in your health you may have noticed or if you haven't been feeling right. Conditions that may increase your risk of falling include:

- Arthritis (Arthritis Foundation).
- Parkinson's Disease (Parkinson's Australia).
- Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease (Alzheimer's Australia).
- Depression (Beyond Blue).
- Stroke (Stroke Foundation).
- Diabetes (Diabetes Tasmania).
- Osteoporosis (Osteoporosis Australia inc. with Arthritis Foundation of Tasmania).
- High or low blood pressure.
- Heart conditions (Heart Foundation).

These conditions may cause you to feel dizzy, confused, light headed, unsteady on your feet or give you blurred vision. If you would like more information on any of these health conditions, please see page 26-27 for contact details.



Outside the home

Hazard	Safeguard
Cracked or cluttered pathways	Carry out maintenance to paths around the home to make sure they are free of cracks and clutter such as leaves and other garden debris.
Uneven surfaces caused by tree roots	Be aware of uneven surfaces and take notice of your surroundings.
Overhanging branches	Maintain and trim branches of trees and shrubs.
Stairs that lack contrast marking or curbs	Take your time when out and about and take extra care when going up or down levels.

Other hazards

Hazard	Safeguard
Unsuitable or poorly maintained walking aids	Make sure walking aids are suited to your needs and they are properly fitted and maintained.
Items of clothing that are too long or too loose	Make sure clothing does not get in your way or restrict your movement.
Pets	Watch for pets under your feet.

Step 9

Identify, Remove and Report Hazards

Hazards inside and outside the home can increase a person's risk of falling.

In the home

Hazard	Safeguard
Slippery or wet floors	Clean up any spills as soon as they happen.
Clutter or obstacles; including electrical cords, loose rugs and furniture	Remove clutter, cords, mats and other loose objects and make sure walkways are clear.
Poor lighting	Make sure there is good lighting throughout your home. A night light may be useful when getting in or out of bed.
Lack of grab rails in bathroom areas or stairs	Install hand rails around stairs; and in toilet, bath or shower areas.
Objects which are placed too high or out of reach	Use a step or a step ladder when accessing objects which are out of reach.



Some short term illnesses such as the flu, diarrhoea or urinary tract infections can also increase your risk of having a fall. It is important to see your GP as soon as possible if you are feeling unwell.

You can help manage your health conditions by:

- Staying active – physically and mentally.
- Eating a wide variety of nutritious foods.
- Drinking plenty of water.

Vitamins recommended by your GP or a Dietician may be beneficial if you are not receiving enough nutrients through your diet. Calcium and vitamin D tablets may also be recommended if you have, or are at risk of developing osteoporosis.

If you consume alcohol, make sure it is in moderation. Excess alcohol can make you unsteady and slow your reaction time.



Step 4

Improve Your Balance

Our balance helps to keep us upright and plays an important part in preventing falls. Up to 25% of falls in older people can be caused by poor balance or poor walking style.

Things which may affect your balance include:

- Stiff joints.
- Muscle weakness in legs.
- Some medicines.
- Inner ear problems.
- Quick or sudden movements such as getting up quickly from sitting or lying down.
- Recovering from illness or surgery.
- Footwear or foot problems.
- Impaired vision.



- Getting enough calcium in your diet is important in order to maintain healthy, strong bones and decrease your risk of developing osteoporosis. Examples of foods high in calcium include milk or soy milk, cheese, yoghurt and bony fish such as sardines or salmon. If you are unable to consume enough calcium in your diet, your GP may recommend calcium supplements.
- Vitamin D plays a key role in helping the body absorb calcium for good bone health. Spending time outdoors in the sun will maximise your Vitamin D absorption. It is best to do this when the sun is not too hot; either before 10am or after 4pm.
- Protein helps you to maintain strong muscles. This is important in helping you undertake regular physical activity and Stay On Your Feet® to prevent falls.

Step 8

Eat Well for Life

It is important for you to have a balanced diet and eat well. Poor nutrition and skipping meals can cause you to feel weak, dizzy, light headed and reduce your ability to concentrate, which can all lead to a fall.



What can you do to maintain a healthy diet?

- Eat at least three meals a day, with plenty of fruits and vegetables. It is also important to have a variety of good foods from all the five food groups in your diet.
- Aim to consume 6-8 glasses of water a day.
- Keep alcohol consumption to a minimum as this can slow your reactions, judgement and coordination and make you unsteady.



Your GP can help you to identify things which may affect your balance. They may suggest that you consider trying exercises aimed at increasing your strength and balance. A health professional such as a Physiotherapist can help you with this.

If you feel unsteady on your feet and are worried about having a fall, a safe home environment can help. Health professionals such as an Occupational Therapist and Physiotherapist can advise you about home aids or any modifications that may be of benefit. The Independent Living Centre can advise you on possible changes you can make around your house. Please see page 27 for contact details.

Step 5

Walk Tall

It is important to keep your body upright and straight when you are walking. As you get older, the way you walk – or walking pattern, can change. Common changes include:

- Feet not lifting high enough off the ground.
- Shorter steps.
- Leaning forward (stooping) when walking.



How can you ensure you walk tall and reduce your risk of falling?

- Stay physically active and do exercises which improve your balance and help you stay strong and flexible in your trunk.
- If you think you need a walking aid, talk to your GP, Physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist about the options available. It is important to get a proper assessment and advice when obtaining a walking aid as unsuitable or broken equipment may be a hazard.

What can you do to look after your eyesight and reduce your risk of falling?

- Have your eyesight reviewed yearly by your GP and at least once every two years by your optometrist.
- Always wear the correct glasses as prescribed by your Optometrist and ensure that these are clean and free from dust or scratches.
- If you wear bifocal or multifocal glasses, take extra care when walking on stairs or steps as these can make it difficult to judge where to put your feet.
- New glasses can take time to get used to. Allow up to two weeks to get used to new eyewear. If you are still having difficulties, return to your Optometrist.
- Try to avoid sudden changes in light. Allow your eyes time to adjust if moving quickly from light to dark or vice versa.
- Make sure your home has good lighting throughout and ensure areas you walk in are well lit. If you need to get up in the night, turn on a lamp and make sure your glasses are within reach.



Step 7

Regularly Check Your Eyesight

Your eyesight may change a number of ways as you get older. The most common changes that occur are:

- Blurring or less acute vision (i.e. seeing few finer details when looking at nearby objects).
- Blurring of distance vision (i.e. difficulties seeing street signs when driving).
- Dryness or watering of the eyes.
- Difficulty judging distance, depth and contrast.
- Eyes taking longer to adjust to changes in light.
- Increased sensitivity to glare.

These changes can occur slowly over time and may go unnoticed. They may also be the result of the development of eye disorders such as cataracts, glaucoma or macular degeneration. For more information on any of these conditions please see page 27 for contact details.



Step 6

Foot Care and Safe Footwear



As you get older your feet may change shape or lose feeling. Foot problems can be uncomfortable and cause pain which can make it difficult to walk and affect your balance. Common foot problems include:

- Stiffness in foot joints.
- Ulcers.
- Bunions.
- Calluses.
- Ingrown toenails.
- Collapsed arches.

See your GP or Podiatrist if you have any pain or foot problems. They will also be able to provide you with foot exercises to help maintain good circulation, strength and movement in your feet.

If you have foot problems and are wearing unsafe footwear, this can make your risk of falling even greater. Choose your footwear for comfort and safety.



A safe shoe has the following features:

- Firm fitting with laces or Velcro fasteners to hold your foot in.
- Broad, flared heels with a rounded edge are stable and give a lot of contact with the ground.
- Textured sole with good grip to prevent slipping; a shoe repairer may be able to add grips to shoes you already have.
- A thin, firm mid sole to enable you to feel the ground underneath – unless you have been advised otherwise by your GP or Podiatrist.

What makes a shoe unsafe?

- Soft or stretched upper which allows the foot to slide around in the shoe.
- High or narrow heels.
- Slippery or worn soles.
- Slip on shoes or scuffs.
- Heavy shoes.
- Ill-fitting shoes.
- Worn out shoes or slippers.