ASSOCIATION OF AMBULANCE CHIEF EXECUTIVES

BGS British Geriatrics Society Improving healthcare for older people

What to do if you fall - and how to prevent it

A message from the Association of Ambulance Chief Executives on behalf of all UK ambulance services, supported by the British Geriatrics Society and the Royal College of Emergency Medicine.

Falls can occur quickly and suddenly for many reasons. Anyone can fall, but the risk is higher if you're over 65, live with a long-term condition, or have problems with balance or mobility.

Falls are common - around one in three people aged 65 and over who live at home will fall at least once a year, rising to one in two for those over 80 - but many of the injuries and worries that follow can be avoided if you know what to do.

If you do fall - stay as calm as you can

Take a moment to check how you feel before trying to move. Rushing can make things worse.



If you feel able to get up safely

1. Take your time - don't hurry.
2. Roll onto your side, then push up onto your hands and knees.
3. Crawl to something sturdy (a heavy chair, the sofa, or the bath).
4. Place one foot flat on the floor, keep hold of the sturdy item, and slowly stand up.
5. Sit down somewhere safe and rest for a while.

If you cannot get up

1. If you can reach a phone, lifeline alarm or pendant, use it straight away to call for help.
2. If you can't reach one, shout for help or bang on the floor or wall to attract a neighbour's attention.
3. Keep warm - pull a coat, blanket, rug or towel over you if you can reach one.
4. Move as much as you comfortably can (wiggle arms and legs or roll gently from side to side) every half hour or so. This helps your circulation and reduces the risk of pressure sores.
5. If you're going to be on the floor for a long time and have water within reach, take small sips to stay hydrated.

When to call 999 for an ambulance

Please ring 999 straight away if you or the person who has fallen:

- Cannot get up, even with help
- Is confused, not fully awake, drowsy or vomiting
- Has injured their head, neck, back or hip
- Has severe bleeding

If you encounter someone who has fallen, keep them warm and comfortable. Only help them up if it is clearly safe to do so - never try to lift or move someone yourself if you're unsure.

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When to contact NHS 111

Call 111 (or visit www.111.nhs.uk) if you've had a fall and:

- You're in pain or feel unwell
- You're worried you might be injured



Simple steps to help prevent falls

A few small changes can make a big difference to your safety and confidence:

✔ Do

- Carry a mobile phone or wear a pendant alarm whenever possible
- Make sure someone trusted has a key or you have a key-safe outside
- Practise getting up from the floor when you're feeling well (there are excellent short videos on the NHS Inform website)
- Stay as active as you can - try to move a little every day and include activities that improve strength and balance at least twice a week
- Wear well-fitting slippers or shoes with good grip (avoid loose slippers or going barefoot)
- Use non-slip mats in the bath or shower
- Eat regular meals, drink plenty of fluids, and include calcium-rich foods for bone health
- Have your eyes and hearing checked regularly
- Speak to your GP or pharmacist if you feel dizzy or unsteady - some medicines can affect balance

✕ Don't

- Struggle with jobs that feel risky (reaching high shelves, climbing steps) - ask for help
- Leave trailing wires, loose rugs or clutter where you walk
- Drink too much alcohol, especially if you feel unsteady
- Rush when you stand up - take your time

You don't have to manage alone. Family, friends, neighbours and local services are there to help.

Where to find more help

- AACE website: www.aace.org.uk/falls-guidance
- NHS Inform – What to do after a fall (including helpful videos): www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/preventing-falls
- Age UK Preventing Falls advice and free helpline: 0800 678 1602 (8am–7pm every day)
- Chartered Society of Physiotherapy - "Get Up and Go" booklet (free download here): www.csp.org.uk/publications/get-go-guide-staying-steady-english-version
- Your local council may offer free home safety checks and small adaptations

Remember that good preparation for potential falls can keep you safer and more independent.