



St. Mary's Hospital  
Phoenix Park



# Falls Awareness: Live Life Safely



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# Introduction

The risk of falling increases as we get older.

This Booklet aims to provide guidance to reduce the risks of falls by:

- Helping identify risk factors which can cause falls
- Offering helpful hints to reduce the risk of falling
- Giving advice on what to do if you have a fall
- Providing useful contact numbers.



# Safety Tips

## Indoors

- Remove mats, rugs or cords that you could trip over.
- Place cords behind furniture or tape them to the wall or floor.
- Wipe up spills IMMEDIATELY.
- Do not rush when answering the phone.
- The home should be kept clutter free.



## Lighting

- **ALWAYS** have the light on when using the stairs.
- Leave the landing light switched on overnight to prevent any falls.
- Sensor lights at the front and ideally the back of the home are helpful in reducing potential falls.
- Ask someone else to replace a high bulb.
- Keep a torch at your bedside.

## Support

- Grab bars can help you get into and out of your bath or shower, and can help prevent falls. Many people fit grab rails
  - at the toilet
  - at the shower/bath
  - at the front/back door of the home where there are steps
  - in hallways/landing area of the home to provide added support when walking.
- An additional stair-rail would add to a person's safety when using the stairs.
- Many pieces of furniture are not designed to take human weight and as a result should not be used as support when walking.



## Outdoors

- Walk on level surfaces where possible.
- Avoid slippery surfaces e.g. mossy steps, icy paths.
- Use your walking aid at all times.
- Information can be obtained from Occupational Therapy, Physio and nursing team.





## Vision Tips

- Have your eyes tested at least every two years.
- Wear your prescribed glasses as recommended by your optician.
- Do not wear bifocals when walking up and down the steps.
- Separate glasses for reading and distance are safer than bifocals or varifocals.
- Clean your glasses regularly.



## Hearing Tips

- Have your ears examined every year.
- Wear your hearing aid as recommended.
- Seek advice.  
Hearing Services 44 North Great  
George's Street, Dublin 1 Tel: (01) 874 7726
- St. Mary's hearing service is available to Residents and Day Hospital attendees.



## Medication Tips

- It is important that you attend your GP for a review of your medication every six months.
- If dizziness or loss of balance is a problem, consult your doctor as soon as possible.
- Be aware that sleeping tablets and tranquilizers can increase the risk of falling. If concerned consult your GP.



## Alcohol Advice

- If you take alcohol do not exceed the recommended limits:  
**Men - 21 units/week**  
**Women - 14 units/week**  
1 unit = 1 small glass of wine/measure of spirit.  
2 units = 1 pint of beer/stout/cider.
- Taking alcohol while on medication may increase the risk of falling.



## Smoking Advice

- Smoking decreases bone strength and can lead to osteoporosis, and possible fractures.
- If you want to stop smoking the Quit-line phone no is: 1850 201203. Mon-Fri 9am-5pm.



# Eating Well

## Calcium and Vitamin D

A diet rich in calcium and vitamin D is important for bone health.

It is recommended that all adults should have three servings of calcium every day in their diet.



### One serving is:

#### Milk sources

- A glass of milk
- 1oz cheese (matchbox size) / 10oz of cottage cheese
- 1 carton of yogurt
- 1 bowl of rice pudding, semolina, custard (made with milk)
- 1 glass of soya milk
- 1 mug of hot chocolate / coffee made on milk



#### Non milk sources include

- 1 x 40g serving Ready Brek
- 1 glass of Fortified orange juice
- 2ozs tinned fish with bones e.g. sardines, pilchards, salmon

## Sources of Vitamin D

The best source of vitamin D is sunshine, but it is also necessary to include it in your diet as it helps the body absorb calcium.

### Dietary sources include:

- Oily fish e.g. salmon, mackerel, herring, trout, sardines
- Eggs and dairy products e.g. milk, yogurts
- Fortified foods e.g. spreads, breakfast cereals and bread.
- Your GP may prescribe calcium and vitamin D supplements.



## Weight

- It is important to eat regular meals and maintain a healthy weight.
- Being underweight can increase your risk of osteoporosis and bone fractures.
- Being overweight can put excessive strain and pressure on your joints. If you are concerned, discuss this with your GP regarding dietitian referral.

## Hydration

- Aim to have at least 6-8 cups fluid/day e.g. water, milk, juice and tea.



# What else can you do?

## Footwear

Ensure footwear is comfortable with good grip on the sole and back support.

Velcro straps offer good comfort, especially if you have difficulty with swollen feet or find it difficult managing lace up footwear.

If your feet are swollen, speak to your Physiotherapist who will advise on appropriate footwear.



Worn out / over size shoes can lead to falls.

## Hip Protectors

These protective pants are cushioned around the hips to absorb the force of a fall and minimize hip fracture. They come in different sizes and are machine washable. Your Physiotherapist will measure and advise you on the correct usage of this.

## Mobility Aids

Physiotherapist may recommend the use of a walking stick, Zimmer frame or a rollator frame following assessment of balance.

Your Physiotherapist will provide you with training on the usage to make sure that you are safe using it.

These aids are to provide needed support for people with reduced balance.



4 Wheel Rollator



Zimmer Frame

It is important to maintain this equipment by checking the ferrules, (rubber end on your walking frame, stick etc), wheels and brakes for wear and tear. Any damage should be reported to your Physiotherapist.

## Clothing

Be aware clothes that are too long e.g. dressing gown, trousers, or skirts can pose a trip hazard.

## Getting up from a Fall

If you feel you are not hurt and able to move, the following is a safe method of getting up.

1. Roll onto your side.
2. Raise your body off the floor, pushing yourself onto one hip.
3. Push up slowly onto your hands and knees (crawling position).
4. Crawl to a firm supportive chair and place one hand on the seat followed by the second hand so that you are kneeling.
5. Lift the better leg up with the foot flat on the ground -kneeling on one leg.
6. Push up into standing position using both hands.
7. Summon help.



## Keeping Active

Activities are an essential part of our daily existence. It helps us to meet our social and psychological needs which are important for our health.

Exercise keeps us fit and improves muscle strength and balance which helps reduce the risk of falling, e.g. gentle exercise, walking the dog, gardening, dancing. Reading, crosswords, bingo, scrabble etc. helps keep the mind alert by improving concentration and memory.



## Organisations

Age Action Ireland.....4756989

Age Action Care & Repair Service

Lo call .....1890 369369

Website: [www.ageaction.ie](http://www.ageaction.ie)

National Smokers Quit-line 1850 201203

Hearing Services .....8747726

**Keep a list of important contacts near each phone in the house that is easily accessible and is in large print.**

## **Useful Contacts**

### **Number**

GP/Doctor .....

Public Health Nurse .....

Home Help.....

Carer .....

## **St Mary's Hospital**

St. Mary's Main No.:	625 0300
Day Hospital.....	625 0313
Healthy Ageing Clinic.....	625 0414

## **Emergency numbers**

Relative.....

Neighbour.....

Garda .....	112
Ambulance .....	112

**Take care. Be prepared.**

## **Other Useful Tips**

- Always wear your pendant alarm.
- Tell your family and/or your doctor if you have had a fall.
- If you fall and can't get up, try to keep warm by pulling a blanket/coat over your body.

## **Reference**

This booklet was put together by the Falls Multidisciplinary Committee, St. Mary's hospital, Phoenix Park, Dublin 20.