

# FALLS

## FALLS AND INJURIES

### Staying safe continued

If you get any of the following problems stop exercising and ask for medical advice from your GP or by contacting NHS Direct (see box below)

- Discomfort in your chest or upper body brought on by physical activity
- Uncomfortable or severe breathlessness, dizziness or nausea
- Fainting during or just after doing physical activity
- Palpitations (a very fast or irregular heart beat) during activity.

### Qualified instructors and local opportunities

Teaching older patients requires special training. It is highly recommended that you should seek the advice of a trained Postural Stability Instructor who will help give you individual advice on the most effective forms of activity. They will also be able to guide you towards local programmes and classes. You can find a qualified Instructor who will be local to you by telephoning the Later Life Training number below.

Your local town hall, health promotion or leisure services department will have a list of activities and classes for older adults. However, you may prefer to exercise in the privacy of your own home. Books, tapes and videos are available from a number of sources. Ensure they are safe by contacting organisations such as Research Into Ageing, Age Concern or Extend for their advice.

Remember: The more active you are, the more benefits you will get.

## Be active - be safe - have fun!

### For more information

- Age Concern 0800 009966 or [www.ageconcern.org.uk](http://www.ageconcern.org.uk)
- Extend 01582 832760 or [www.extend.org.uk](http://www.extend.org.uk)
- Help the Aged 020 7278 114 or [www.helptheaged.org.uk](http://www.helptheaged.org.uk)
- Later Life Training 020 8998 7672 or e-mail [info@laterlifetraining.co.uk](mailto:info@laterlifetraining.co.uk)
- NHS Direct 0845 4647 or [www.nhsdirect.co.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.co.uk)
- SportEX Health - information on physical activity [www.sportex.net](http://www.sportex.net)

### Local information



Everyone trips now and again but at some point many of us become 'fallers'. For some there is a known reason such as epilepsy or stroke but for others it is just the body being unable to correct an imbalance and avoid the fall. The worry about falling often limits you from doing other activities. This may lead to further health problems and eventually to a decline in the ability to do everyday tasks such as getting up and down from the floor. This can affect our confidence, limit our social life and lead to loneliness and even depression. Research shows that 'fallers' lead more sedentary lives, have weaker muscles, suffer more depression, take more medications and become dependent earlier than 'non-fallers'.

### A FEW FACTS

- One third of over 65s fall every year
- Falls account for nearly 10% of all ambulance call outs
- From mid-life we lose strength and bone at 1-2% per year
- More than 40% of over 50s are sedentary
- 25% of over 70s are unable to walk a quarter of a mile unaided

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# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND PREVENTING FALLS

## How does physical activity help prevent falls?

- As we get older, functions such as muscle power (how fast we can use our muscle strength) and balance are 'lost', particularly if we are inactive. Much of this loss is simply lack of use and maintaining an active lifestyle can help slow this loss and even gain reserves.
- The good news is that research shows that even into the ninth decade the body retains its ability to respond to appropriate physical activity. In as little as 10-12 weeks, as long as appropriate activities are carried out, newcomers to exercise can turn back the clock by up to 20 years in terms of their muscular and aerobic fitness.
- In addition physical activity can lead to significant improvements in mood, depression, urinary urgency and balance problems resulting from circulatory and inner ear problems. These are all risk factors for falls.
- Physical activity also helps reduce many other forms of ill health such as high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, being overweight and the risk of developing diabetes.
- Other benefits include reductions in the risk of several types of cancers and osteoporosis and helping you sleep better.

## What type of activity is best?

It is important to exercise all the parts of your body that are involved in balance as well as retain the ability to get up and down from the floor. It appears that a combination of strength, co-ordination, stamina and balance including Tai Chi training, offers the best benefits.

**Stamina-type activities:** Walking, swimming, cycling, dancing, tennis and housework (washing floors or windows)

**Strength-type activities:** Walking uphill, carrying shopping, climbing stairs, gardening (digging or mowing) and housework

**Balance-type activities:** Dancing, yoga, Pilates, and T'ai Chi

### Tips on increasing your activity level

- Walking is an ideal activity as it's free and easy to do anywhere. Perhaps take a dog for a walk to make it more interesting.
- Look for opportunities to be active during your whole day. For example park at the far end of the car park, or walk one stop further to catch the bus, and take 10 minutes out of your lunch break to go for a walk.
- Try using the stairs instead of the escalator. If you do use the escalator start by walking part of the way up and gradually progress to walking up the whole way.
- Choose activities that you enjoy doing. Involve your friends and family to make your activities fun, sociable and enjoyable.

## How much and how often?

**Frequency** Your main aim is to build up to 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on 5 or more days of the week. If this seems too much to start with, try starting with 3 x 10 minute walks spread throughout the day and work towards 2 x 15 minute walks and then 30 continuous minutes. One goal is to try and increase your activity by 2 minutes each day.

**Intensity** Moderate intensity means breathing harder and getting warmer than normal. It does not need to be hard. You should be able to talk and be active at the same time.

**Advice** Whatever your chosen activity, it should be performed at a gentle intensity which gradually increases until after about 10 minutes you have reached the level you can maintain for your chosen period of activity. This gets the blood flowing to your muscles and allows your heart rate to increase gradually. When you are nearing the end of your activity you should also slowly decrease the level of activity over 5-10 minutes to allow your heart rate to slow down gradually.

**Remember** Set yourself realistic goals and don't worry if you miss one day. Just make sure that the next day you pick up where you left off.

## Staying safe

- It is a good idea to have your blood pressure checked before starting any activity and regularly after this.
- If you do not know how much physical activity you can do safely or you have other medical concerns for example arthritis or angina, or you are taking medications, ask your GP or practice nurse for advice because sometimes your response to exercise will differ with certain medicines.
- Wear comfortable clothing that does not restrict movement. A number of layers that can be removed to adjust to your body or room temperature is a good idea.
- Wear shoes with soles that are firm but not rigid. Ideally shoes should have laces rather than the slip-on type to be safe. Single lens glasses are safer than bifocals or varifocals during exercise.
- Do not exercise if you are unwell, have a temperature, chest infection, or inflamed swelling of a joint. Avoid tipping your head backwards, turning or changing direction too fast and always feel the chair behind your knees before you sit down.