How to keep your home safe

Gateshead Primary Care Trust
South Tyneside Primary Care Trust
Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust
Falls can be a common problem which can be avoided if some simple advice is followed.

This leaflet will give you some information about how to keep your home safe to minimise the risk of a fall.

**How can I make my home safer?**

There are a few simple steps that you can take to make your home safer.

**How safe is your flooring in your home?**

You need to think about the following:

- Do your carpets and mats lie flat without wrinkles or any curled edges?
- Do you have any loose mats in your home?
- Are your floors free from clutter?
- Are all your cables and cords away from walkways?
- Are your floor surfaces slip resistant?

Polished floors can be slippery, so carpets and unglazed tiles will reduce the risk of slips or trips. It is worth removing all loose mats and rugs or to ensure that they are firmly secured with a slip resistant backing. Be aware of the dangers of laminate floors and pets in the home.
Also make sure that any cords or cables are next to the wall so that you won't trip over them.

**Do you have adequate lighting in your home?**
Always make sure that your rooms, stairways and the main entrance to your property are well lit.
It is always worth considering installing sensor lights in passageways or plug in nightlights to provide light in dark passageways.

**How safe are your stairs and steps in your home?**
Ask yourself whether you are able to see clearly the edges of the steps and if your stairs and steps are well lit.
Make sure that you have one, preferably two handrails on the stairs. Avoid clutter on the stairs and avoid leaving items on the stairs to take up later.

**Do you have a letter cage fitted for your post?**
If you have difficulty bending down or suffer from dizziness, it may be worth considering fitting a letter cage for your post to make things easier for you and avoid any stooping or bending over.
How safe is your bathroom and toilet?

Wet areas are more likely to be slippery so take extra care when walking on a wet surface. Use a slip resistant mat for your own safety. Be aware of the dangers of dry spills also such as talcum powder.

Make sure you have everything you need e.g. soap, shampoo, towels, before you get into the bath to prevent you having to bend or reach too far.

Handrails are recommended in and around the bath, shower and toilet to help support you.

How safe is your kitchen?

Try to make sure that you are near a work surface in case you need to put hot or heavy items down quickly.

Make sure that you have a stool or chair in the kitchen in case you need to sit down when you are tired.

Try to wipe all spills on the floor as slippery floors can cause a fall. Be aware of dry spills such as flour, sugar and salt.

Try to keep everyday items within easy reach.
How safe is your living area?

It is worth asking yourself if you are able to get out of your lounge chair without too much difficulty. Higher chairs and chairs with solid armrests are easier to get in and out of.

Remove any loose rugs or apply slip resistant backing.

Think about having a cordless telephone handy so that you can always get in touch with someone if need be in an emergency.

How safe is your bedroom?

Make sure your bed is the right height for you. Always have a light by the bed, so that it can be switched off from the bed.

A firm mattress will make getting in and out of bed easier. Ensure your bedspread is clear of the floor and you don't trip over it.

Always have your walking aid handy in case you need to get up during the night.

Try and have a telephone extension or your home alarm call pendant by your bed.
What about outside of your home?
Make sure all outside steps are easy to see by painting the front edge of your step a contrasting colour. Make sure your paths are even and unbroken and try to keep paths free of moss and leaves, taking extra care when it's wet.

Why not use this checklist to think about the possible hazards in your home.

**General:**

When you walk through a room, do you have to walk around furniture?
Get someone to help you move things so that your path is clear. Remember to always use your walking aid correctly.

Are there papers, magazines, books, toys, shoes, boxes, blankets, towels or other objects on the floor?
Try to keep your rooms free of clutter and keep all objects off the floor.

Do you have to walk over or around cords or wires? (for example cords and wires from lamps, extension cords or telephone cords)
Coil or tape cords and wires next to the wall so that you can't trip over them.
Do you have a letter box cage to avoid bending to pick up your letters?
These are an excellent device to stop you from bending over and will also stop papers from being spread across the floor.

Do you have loose rugs or runners on the floor?
Remove the rugs and runners or use double sided adhesive carpet tape to prevent them from slipping.

Do you have thresholds between doorways?
Consider applying carpet grippers instead to prevent you tripping over.

If you fall, do you have access to a cordless/mobile phone or do you have a system for calling for help?
A personal alarm pendant is a good way to get help quickly and will give you peace of mind. Keeping a mobile phone or cordless telephone in your clothing pocket will also help you to get help if you need it.

Do you use a walking aid?
If so, make sure it is within easy reach. Check that your ferrule is safely applied to your walking aid. This is the rubber end which is attached to the bottom of your aid. Make sure that there is a 'ridge' evident and that your ferrule is not smooth as this will help keep you steady when you walk.
Is your footwear including slippers in good condition?
Make sure they support your ankle, have non slip soles and don't have a high heel. If your footwear is right, it will help you walk easier and keep you steady on your feet.

Is your clothing too long or loose?
Make sure your clothing is not loose and does not trail on the floor in case you trip over it. Look out for dressing gown ties in case they trail on the floor and cause you to stumble.

Does your house feel warm and cosy?
Keeping your house warm will reduce the risk of falls as it helps with your circulation. Why not keep a thermometer handy to make sure all the rooms in your home are warm and cosy.

**Bedroom**

Is your bed the right height? Do your feet reach the floor when you sit on the edge?
Why not consider a grab-rail which could be fixed near to the bed to assist you in getting up.

Is there a light that can be turned on and off from the bed?
Why not ask your relative or friend to position a lamp that you can reach from your bed or a pull cord near your bed for the main light.
Is your bedding clear of the floor? Always make sure that you won't get your foot caught in your bed sheets and potentially fall. Make sure it is clear of the floor for your own safety.

**Stairs**

Do you have adequate lighting on your stairs and landings? It is really important that you can see clearly when using the stairs and that your home is well lit.

Do you have a handrail on your stairs? It's always a good idea to have one, but preferably two handrails when going up and down the stairs.

Are your carpets in good condition? Worn carpets with frayed edges can cause serious falls and it is advisable to have these replaced.

Are the edges of your steps easy to see and free from clutter? If not, a strip of white masking tape on the edge of each step will help you see more clearly especially if your eye sight is not so good. Avoid placing items on the stairs.
Bathroom

Does your flooring have a slippery surface or do you have laminate flooring?
Non slip mats, a fitted carpet or carpet tiles should be used. Make sure wet floors are mopped up as soon as possible. Be aware of dangers of dry spills such as talcum powder.

Do you have a non slip mat in the bath/shower and a grab rail?
Non slip, rubberised mats are readily available. Grab rails may assist you in getting in and out of the shower.

Are shampoos, soap and towels easy to reach in the bathroom?
If not, make sure all your items that you use regularly are near to hand to stop you leaning over and possibly loosing your balance and falling.

Kitchen

Is everything within easy reach without stretching or climbing on chairs/stools?
Stretching and reaching above head height can make you feel dizzy and there is a temptation to climb up on chairs to reach something. Keep the items you use regularly near the front and on a lower level.
Are there any wet / dry spills?
Try to wipe up all spills on the floor as slippery floors can cause a fall. Be aware of the dangers of dry spills such as flour, salt etc as well as wet floors.

**Outside the house**

Are your paths and paving slabs in good repair and free of clutter?
Try to ensure your pathways are clear and if you have any over hanging bushes that they are cut back.

Do you have an outside light?
Remember lighting is very important to reduce the risk of slipping or tripping.

Is your garden free of trip hazards, such as tools and hoses?
Remember to keep all walkways free.

Do you have any external steps to your property?
Make sure all outside steps are easy to see by painting the front edge of the step a contrasting colour.
For further information, please contact the following falls services:

Gateshead
Jubilee Wing
Queen Elizabeth Hospital
Gateshead
Telephone: 0191 445 3817

South Tyneside
Perth Green House
Inverness Road
Jarrow
Telephone: 0191 423 4600

Sunderland
Galleries Day Unit
Galleries Health Centre
Washington
Telephone: 0191 502 6810

NHS South of Tyne and Wear (serving Gateshead Primary Care Trust, South Tyneside Primary Care Trust and Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust) is committed to raising the standard of written information for patients, their carers, people who use the NHS and the general public.

This information can be made available in another format or language on request. Please contact the Communications and PR Team Tel: 0191 529 7118 Email: mopil@sotw.nhs.uk