Falls: the assessment and prevention of falls in older people

Understanding NICE guidance – information for older people, their families and carers, and the public

November 2004

Information about NICE Clinical Guideline 21
Falls: the assessment and prevention of falls in older people
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Copies of this booklet can be ordered from the NHS Response Line; telephone 0870 1555 455 and quote reference number N0761. A version in English and Welsh is also available, reference number N0762. Mae fersiwn yn Gymraeg ac yn Saesneg ar gael hefyd, rhif cyfeirnod N0762. The NICE clinical guideline on which this information is based, 'The assessment and prevention of falls in older people', is available from the NICE website (www.nice.org.uk/CG021NICEguideline). A quick reference guide for healthcare professionals is also available from the website (www.nice.org.uk/CG021NICEquickrefguide), and the NHS Response Line, reference number N0760.

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## Contents

**About this information**
- Clinical guidelines 3
- What the recommendations cover 4
- How guidelines are used in the NHS 5
- If you want to read the other versions of this guideline 6

**Falls and older people** 7

Assessing the risk of a fall
- Checking balance and walking 8
- Having a ‘falls risk assessment’ 9

Reducing the risk of a fall
- Having an overall plan for avoiding falls 12
- If you've been injured through a fall 13
- Being safe at home 13
- Exercise 14
- Stopping certain medicines 15
- Fainting, blackouts and unexplained falls 16

Helping you to help yourself 18
Things that are not recommended for reducing the risk of falling

No evidence
Not enough evidence

Getting information about preventing falls

Further information
About this information

This information describes the guidance that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (called NICE for short) has issued to the NHS on falls. It is based on 'Falls: the assessment and prevention of falls in older people', which is a clinical guideline produced by NICE for doctors, nurses and others working in the NHS in England and Wales. Although this information has been written chiefly for people who are at risk of a fall and their families, it may also be useful for those who care for people at risk of a fall and anyone interested in the care of older people or in healthcare in general. Please note that the word 'carer' is used in this booklet to mean someone who cares for an older person but is not paid for doing so.

Clinical guidelines

Clinical guidelines are recommendations for good practice. The recommendations in NICE guidelines are prepared by groups of health workers, lay representatives with experience or knowledge of the condition being discussed, and scientists. The groups look at the evidence available on the best way of treating or managing a condition and make recommendations based on this evidence.
There is more about NICE and the way that the NICE guidelines are developed on the NICE website (www.nice.org.uk). You can download the booklet *The guideline development process – an overview for stakeholders, the public and the NHS* from the website, or you can order a copy by phoning the NHS Response Line on 0870 1555 455 (quote reference number N0472).

**What the recommendations cover**

NICE clinical guidelines can look at different areas of diagnosis, treatment, care, self-help or a combination of these. The areas that a guideline covers depend on the topic. They are laid out in a document called the scope at the start of guideline development.

The recommendations in the NICE guideline on falls cover older people who live in the community, either at home, in a retirement complex, or in a residential or nursing home. In this guideline, an older person is defined as someone who is aged 65 or older. The NICE guideline doesn’t cover older people who are bed bound or who are in hospital for reasons other than treatment after a fall. Also, it does not look at the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis, which will be covered in another NICE guideline that is expected to be published.
in June 2005 (see the NICE website www.nice.org.uk for an update on this guideline).

The information that follows tells you about the NICE guideline on falls. It doesn’t attempt to explain the risks or the different forms of help available in detail.

If you have questions about the specific issues covered, talk to your nurse or doctor (or another health professional or practitioner, depending on what it is you want to know).

How guidelines are used in the NHS

In general, health professionals and practitioners in the NHS are expected to follow NICE’s clinical guidelines. But there will be times when the recommendations won’t be suitable for someone because of his or her specific medical condition, general health, wishes or a combination of these. If you think that the treatment or care you receive does not match the treatment or care described in the pages that follow, you should talk to your nurse, doctor, or other health professional or practitioner involved in your treatment.