Step up to safety

Information for older people on how to use the stairs safely

Avoiding slips, trips and broken hips

NHS
Health Promotion England
Every year over a million people suffer a non-fatal injury when they fall in the home, with nearly a third of these falls happening on the stairs. Some of those who fall, especially older people, will lose their confidence, be badly injured and may often experience long-term loss of independence as a result.

Keep using the stairs. The exercise is good for you.

This leaflet is designed to give practical advice and simple steps that you can take to reduce the risk of falling on stairs.

You might find it helpful to use the ten top tips as a list to check that your own stairs are safe.

Why not use the booklet with a family member or discuss it with a carer as you plan to make your stairs safer?

**TEN TOP TIPS FOR SAFETY ON THE STAIRS**

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TEN TOP TIPS FOR SAFETY ON THE STAIRS

**TIP 1 Light up your stairs**

- Use the highest wattage light bulbs your light fitting allows – using long-life bulbs will save money over time and they don’t need changing so often.
- Change lampshades to plain, pale colours which let out as much light as possible.
- Change stair walls to plain pale colours so that more light is reflected.
- Always switch the light on when you use the stairs at night.
- Have a switch at the top and the bottom of the stairs.

![Image of people using stairs]

**TIP 2 Take care when carrying things up and down stairs**

- If you are carrying something and cannot use the handrail or see the steps, you may feel 'off balance'. It's much safer to make two journeys.
- Don’t carry things that are too heavy or bulky – ask someone else to carry them for you.
- Take care if you have pets, you may not always see them on your stairs.

![Image of person carrying a baby down stairs]

**TICK**

**TIP 3 Take care when cleaning**

- Be extra careful when vacuuming the stairs. Watch out for wires and pipes that might trip you up.
- Ask for help with this task if you need it.
- Consider using a hand-held cordless vacuum or dustpan and brush.

![Image of person cleaning the stairs]

**TICK**
Keep stairs and landings clear from clutter

- Find a safe place to leave things that need to be taken upstairs.
- Loose rugs on landings and at the top and bottom of the stairs can trip you up. Fix them down or better still remove them.
- Remove furniture from half landings, and the top and bottom of the stairs.

Consider your carpet

- The pattern on your stair carpet can make steps hard to see – edge each one with heavy duty tape of a contrasting colour. Ensure it remains well stuck down.
- Worn, loose or frayed carpet increases the risk of tripping. Have it repaired or replaced.
- If you are choosing a new carpet, try and choose one that is a lighter colour, and plain rather than patterned.

See your stairs

- Take extra care if you use bifocal glasses. You might find it better to use separate glasses for reading and distance. Financial help may be available – ask your optician.
- If you wear glasses during the day, put them on if you get up at night.
- Have an eye test at least every 2 years; these are free for those over 60.
**TIP 7** More haste...less speed

- Avoid having to rush or hurry on the stairs – the phone can wait! Remember that many telephone companies provide a ‘last number’ service free of charge so you can check who was calling.
- Have an intercom fitted upstairs so you don’t have to rush to answer the door.
- Take extra time when using unfamiliar stairs.

**TIP 8** Stay steady

- Mixing alcohol and medications can cause dizziness and loss of balance. Let your GP or nurse know if any of your medicines make you dizzy.
- Be careful of long and trailing clothes, which might trip you up.
- Wear enclosed, thin soled or flat shoes or slippers.

**TIP 9** Hold the handrail

- Get into the habit of using the handrail every time you use the stairs.
- Consider having a second handrail fitted so you can hold on easily either coming up or going down stairs. Make sure it fits comfortably into the grip of your hand.

**TIP 10** Keep using the stairs

**The exercise will help to maintain your muscle strength, your balance and co-ordination.**