

Stepping out safely

A guide to preventing falls



IndependentPeople

Homecare Services



Welcome

Anyone can have a fall, but as we become older we all become more at risk. In fact, around one in three people over 65 who live at home will have at least one fall this year. About half of these will have more frequent falls too. Of course, there's always the risk of broken bones or more serious injuries. But falling can also cause people to lose their confidence, become withdrawn and lead to a loss of independence.

Here at Independent People Homecare, we've produced this short guide to help you reduce your risk of falling. There are lots of easy ways that you can do that – from making a few basic changes around your home to doing some simple exercises to help you improve your balance and strength. We hope you enjoy reading our guide – and that it will help you stay well, stay safe and put your best foot forward!

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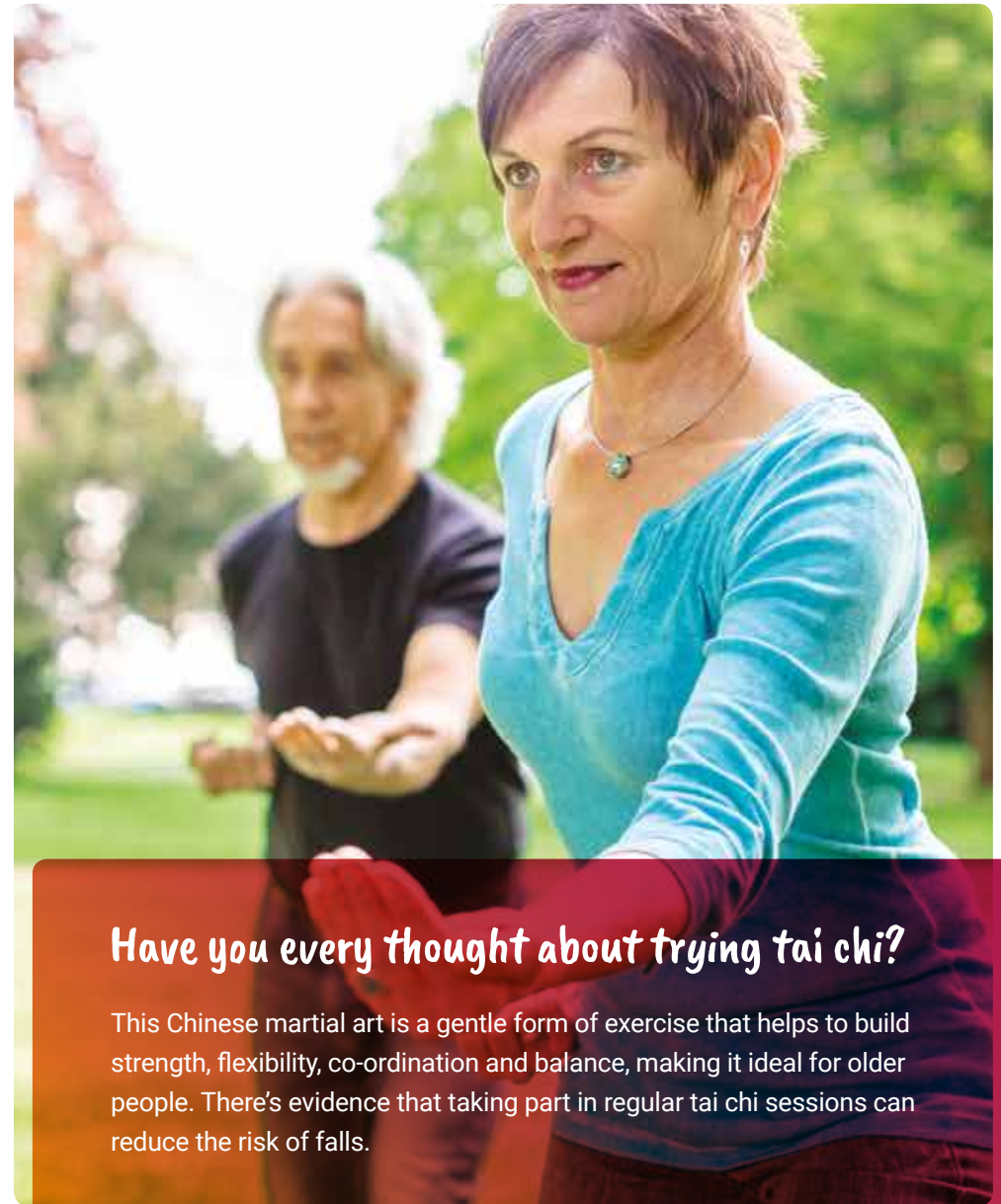
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Simple steps to reduce your risk

If you're concerned about the risk of falling, it's well worth having a chat with your GP. Don't think you'll be wasting their time for a moment. Healthcare professionals take falls in older people extremely seriously, and they understand the impact a fall can have on someone's wellbeing.

Your GP might ask you to do a few simple tests to check your balance. They may also review your medications to check for possible side effects. This is important, because common side effects like dizziness, drowsiness or a drop in blood pressure when you stand up can all increase the risk of a fall. As well as that, your GP can refer you to other services in your area that you might find useful.

Regular physical exercise is a great way to strengthen those muscles – and it helps you feel good too. It's best to find something you really enjoy like gardening, walking, swimming or cycling for example. Exercising in company can be much more fun than doing it alone, so find out if there are any groups in your local area. Also, local community centres and gyms often provide exercise classes that are geared to the needs of older people.



Have you every thought about trying tai chi?

This Chinese martial art is a gentle form of exercise that helps to build strength, flexibility, co-ordination and balance, making it ideal for older people. There's evidence that taking part in regular tai chi sessions can reduce the risk of falls.

7 simple ways to reduce your risk of falls

1 Have your eyesight tested every year

Even if you feel you don't need it. Your optician can also check for glaucoma, cataracts, macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy. Remember – it's free for the over 60's.

2 Avoid rushing for the toilet

Especially at night. If you do find yourself getting up a lot, there is help at hand. Just have a chat with your GP, continence nurse or physiotherapist. Alternatively, you can refer yourself to your local continence clinic for advice and exercises.

3 Avoid alcohol if possible

We all know that drinking alcohol leads to loss of co-ordination and unsteadiness. It can also exaggerate the effects of some medicines. All of this can significantly increase the risk of a fall, especially in older people. The best thing is to avoid alcohol altogether.

4 Choose the right shoes

Wearing well-fitting shoes is really important. As we get older our feet can change shape, so those old shoes may not give you the support you need any more. Check that your slippers aren't worn and provide plenty of grip too.

5 Wear the right clothes

Avoid trailing or loose-fitting clothes that could trip you up. Check that your trouser hems aren't too long and that any cords and ties are not left hanging.

6 Stride, don't shuffle

Some people tend to shuffle along rather than lifting their feet fully when they walk. This increases the chances of tripping up, so stride out with confidence.

7 Put your slippers on

Walking on hard surfaces like wooden floors in socks or tights is never a good idea. That's what slippers are for!

Making changes at home

Not surprisingly, most falls happen in the home or garden. After all, clutter can easily build up, carpets become worn and we might not keep on top of things as well as we once did. But there are some easy things you can do to keep your home safe and minimise the risk of a fall.

Use non-slip rugs and mats – and check for any frayed carpets.

Take a look around for any trailing cables, from lamps for example. You could perhaps tape these to the skirting board.

Clear that clutter! The place will look great when all that clutter has gone.

We need more light as we get older, so use higher-wattage bulbs or talk to a family member or professional electrician about installing extra lighting.

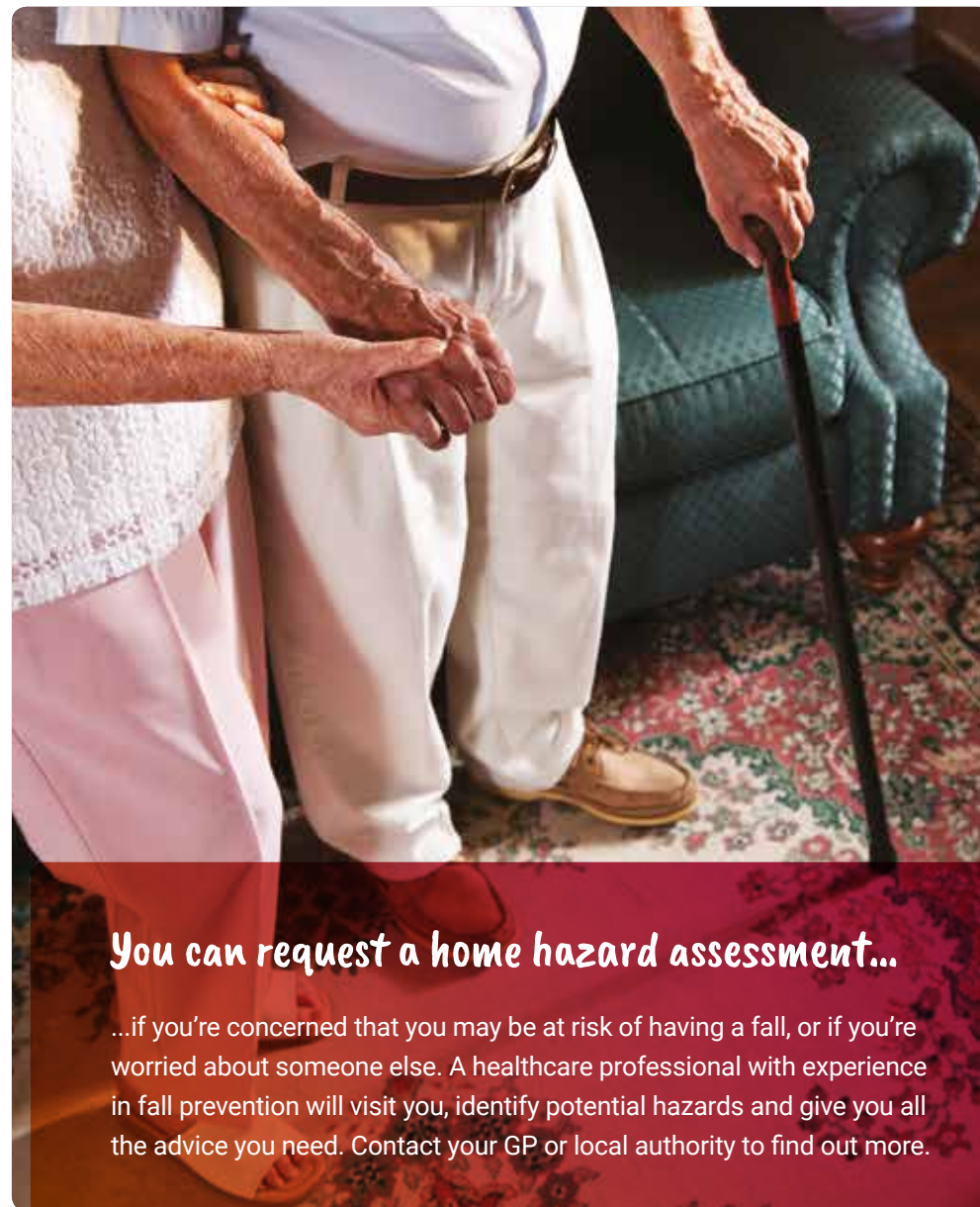
If any liquid has spilled onto the floor, clean it up right away.

Getting up in the dark at night could put you at risk of a fall, so always use your bedside light. If you get up regularly, it could be worth leaving a landing light on.

Organise your home so that you have to do as little reaching and stretching as possible, particularly in the kitchen.

Make sure you use a non-slip mat in the bath or shower – and think about installing grab rails in the bathroom.

You could consider having a personal alarm system, or keep a mobile phone within reach so you can call for help if you have a fall.



You can request a home hazard assessment...

...if you're concerned that you may be at risk of having a fall, or if you're worried about someone else. A healthcare professional with experience in fall prevention will visit you, identify potential hazards and give you all the advice you need. Contact your GP or local authority to find out more.



Many people don't like having to rely...

...on walking aids, but they can help you get out when otherwise you might be stuck in all day. If you go for a walking stick, make sure it's the right length and has a rubber tip to prevent it slipping. Or if you need a little more help, a walking frame or roller frame could be your passport to freedom and independence!

Stepping out safely

Just because we're getting a bit older and might be more at risk of having a fall, it doesn't mean we shouldn't enjoy getting out and about and living life to the full. All we need to do is be aware of what's around us and what might cause a risk. It's really important to take your time. There's no rush and don't worry for a second if you think you're holding people up. People are generally very understanding or don't even notice anyway. The most important thing is that you stay safe.

Keep your eyes open for possible hazards that could cause you to trip like uneven paving slabs, small steps outside shops or obstacles on the pavement. Also watch out for gentle slopes that can easily be missed – near pedestrian crossings for example. Do be careful of some types of surfaces that can become slippery when it's rained, like shiny brick paving in a pedestrian area. Carrying heavy shopping bags can be a pain – literally. They can get in the way of you seeing the pavement in front of you too. **So why not think about using a shopping trolley, or maybe a backpack?**

To find out how we can help you or a loved one at home, call our care team for an informal chat on

0808 278 3171

Staying active

As you become older, it's more important than ever to stay active if you want to keep healthy and maintain your independence. If you don't, you might soon find that you struggle to do the things you enjoy - and you may start getting more aches and pains. You could also be putting yourself at a greater risk of falls.

What's more, there is strong evidence that people who are active have a lower risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, depression and dementia. So let's keep moving! And the great news is that there are lots of ways that you can stay active.



Enjoy a good walk to the shops or to meet friends, rather than catching the bus or getting the car out.



Housework and gardening are both good – and even better if you can do them vigorously.



Swimming or water aerobics. Look out for local classes or groups in your local area.



Nordic walking. This is great fun and brilliant exercise. Again, see if there are any groups in your local area.



Yoga, pilates or tai chi.



When you are sitting down for a while...

...keep your back nice and straight so you don't risk developing a stooped posture. Also, roll your shoulders from time to time. You can help to keep those joints healthy by stretching your legs, bending your wrists and even wiggling your fingers.

Research has shown that it's never too late to enjoy the health benefits of a more active lifestyle. Older people who stay active will actually reduce their risk of heart disease and stroke to a similar level as younger people who are active.

Exercises to keep healthy and mobile

Doing a few simple exercises three or four times a week is a great way to help you stay flexible and strong, as well as improve your balance. You can find a number of exercises by visiting www.nhs.uk and entering 'exercises for older people' in the search box at the top. In the meantime, here are four to get you started.

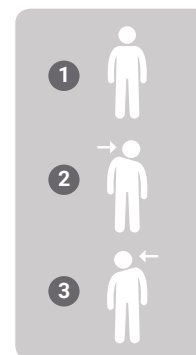


Neck rotation

(Three rotations on each side.)

1. Sit upright with your shoulders relaxed and look straight ahead.
2. Slowly turn your head towards your left shoulder as far as feels comfortable. Hold for five seconds then slowly return to the starting position.
3. Repeat on your right side.

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Sideways bend

(Three rotations on each side.)

1. Stand upright with your feet apart at hip width and your hands by your sides.
2. Slowly slide your left hand down your side as far as you're comfortable. You'll feel a gentle stretch on your right side. Hold this position for two seconds.
3. Slowly return to the starting position. Repeat on your right side.



Sit to stand

(Aim to do this five times – but remember, the slower the better.)

1. Sit on the edge of a chair with your feet apart and lean slightly forward.
2. Stand up slowly using your legs only. Don't use your arms to push yourself up. Keep looking forwards, not down.
3. Once you're standing upright, slowly sit down again.



One leg stand

(Do three stands on each side.)

1. Stand facing a wall with your arms outstretched and your fingertips touching the wall.
2. Slowly lift your left leg, keeping your hips level and slightly bending your right leg.
3. Hold this position for five to 10 seconds then slowly place your foot back on the floor.

What to do if you fall

The first and most important thing is to stay calm. Take a moment to assess the situation and check for injuries.

If you're not hurt and you feel strong enough to get up, follow the steps below. Do take your time though and rest between each stage. If you're unable to get up or you feel any pain in your hips or back, call for help (see the page opposite).

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1. Roll onto your hands and knees and look for a stable piece of furniture like a chair or a bed.
 2. Crawl over to it and hold on with both hands to support yourself.
 3. Slowly, one leg at a time, lift yourself up. Make sure you keep both hands firmly on the furniture for support.
 4. Sit down and take a rest for a few minutes.

If you have a cordless landline phone or mobile phone, it's a good idea to carry it in your pocket or on your belt. Programme the phone with the numbers of neighbours, relatives or friends who could help you if you do have a fall.



If you can't get up...

You'll need to summon help by:

- Calling for help and banging on the wall, floor or a radiator.
- Use your aid call button if you have one.
- If you can get to your phone, call your neighbours, a family member or 999.
- Keep warm. Cover yourself with a blanket, rug, coat or anything else you can find.
- Support your head with a cushion or rolled up piece of clothing.
- Keep moving if you can by changing your position regularly. This will help to keep you warm and maintain circulation.

Case study

Rose's story

When Rose's family contacted us, after a spell in hospital, she was in poor health and her family really didn't want to place her in a nursing home. A friend recommended Independent People Homecare and after seeing profiles of 4 different Carers they chose Andrea as she loved swimming which is their mum's favourite hobby.

Although dizzy and still slightly confused when she returned home, Rose still managed to maintain her wry sense of wit. 'It is comfortable but it's very difficult to get out of' was the closest she came to complaining about her situation. Rose considered herself lucky, surrounded by the love of two warm daughters who wanted the best for her. Both Rose and they believed she could get much better. So did we.

At first, with simple exercises recommended by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, Rose and her Live in carer Andrea worked on getting her legs stronger. While sitting in the chair, she encouraged Rose to work on lower limb strength every day. It didn't take long before getting up was a whole lot easier. With more time and more exercises Rose came along even more. With close supervision and expert support Rose eventually didn't need her frame at all.

As Rose increased her walking distance as the days went passed she began to think about returning to a favourite hobby – swimming!

Rose and her carer Andrea now swim quite often in the small pool Rose thinks she is lucky enough to have at her home. More time has since passed and Rose met another challenge. She is now walking up and downstairs again, with close support of course. Her next goal is to move her bed back upstairs and we can see no reason why this can't happen in the very near future.

With Andrea, her Live in Carer and our expert guidance, there is no doubt that Rose is a much more independent person. She feels in charge of her life and still enjoys living at home instead, much more than the care home that she originally thought she would have to go to.

There is always a choice. Rose chose us and independence. You can too.



Useful contacts

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk

Age UK

www.ageuk.org.uk

T:0800 678 1174

To find out more or to arrange a FREE assessment

Call us on **0808 278 3171**

or email: **hello@iphomecare.co.uk**

or visit: **www.iphomecare.co.uk**



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Homecare Services

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