

Calvary Community Care

Look After the Skin You're In

Falls and Injury Prevention - How not to fall for it



As the skin ages there is a reduction in natural moisturising factors so the ageing skin becomes dry and flaky, less supple and thinner.

Once the skin becomes dry, it is more vulnerable to splitting and cracking. It injures more easily and heals more slowly.

It is just not possible to predict if, how, where and when you might fall.

Even though most falls occur in the home and don't result in serious injury, you may be unable to get up without help. The damage done by any fall depends on how, where and when you land, how strong your bones and skin are, and how quickly help comes. Falling outside in very hot, cold or inclement weather can also cause harm to your body, especially if help doesn't arrive for a while (e.g. sunburn, dehydration, hypothermia).

Promote healthy skin



Do

- use soap substitutes (skin cleansers). Soap is an irritant and can make the skin itchy. Soap substitutes cleanse effectively but do not leave the skin feeling dry

- apply a moisturiser (cream or ointment) regularly, directly to the skin in a downward motion in the direction of hair growth. This will reduce the risk of blocking the hair follicles. This should be applied at least twice daily, preferably after bathing. With regular use, the amount of water in your top layer of skin can be increased. They are available as:
 - Ointments:** they have the highest oil content and are greasy. They can be messy to apply, leave the skin looking shiny and stain clothes. They are suitable for very dry skin and may be best applied at night.
 - Creams:** they are quickly absorbed and therefore more acceptable. Creams are good for daytime use, but are much less effective than ointments.
 - Lotions:** the lightest and least greasy emollients (contain less oil). They are not suitable for dry skin conditions.

- ensure adequate nutrition and hydration (at least 6 large cups of fluid per day, unless your doctor has asked you to restrict your fluids) to repair damaged tissue and assist in protecting against infection. Good nutrition plays a vital role in wound healing also by improving skin health assisting with healing.
- avoid adhesive products on frail skin as removal may cause skin stripping or tearing (If dressings or tapes are required, try use paper tapes or silicone)
- keep finger and toe nails short and/or filed to prevent self-inflicted skin tears.
- take care in the garden (especially around plants with thorns) wear gloves and cover up.
- seek medical advice regarding how to treat eczema, dermatitis, psoriasis etc.

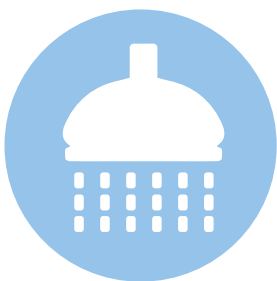
If you are taking anticoagulants you will bruise and bleed more easily (if you aren't sure, ask your doctor). People who have skin that is easily bruised or torn are more likely to need medical help after a fall.

Don't

- shower in water that is too hot
- shower too often or for too long
- use harsh soaps
- overheat your home in the winter months as this can lead to drying of the skin, so save your skin (and your money) by turning down the heat a little.

Prevent skin injury by

- Hazard proofing your home (see 'Hazard Proofing your Home – Practical Ways to Stay Independent and Safe.')
- Planning what you will do in case of a fall. This will help you feel not only safer but more confident, independent and in control of your life (see 'Plan what to do if you Fall')
- As difficult as it may be for you to consider, trying to realistically think about the things that are now too risky for you to do, and arrange for someone else to do them.
- wearing long sleeves, long pants or knee-high socks
- ensuring you live in a safe environment with adequate lighting
- minimising objects that can be a source of blunt trauma by e.g. padding edges of furniture and equipment
- having uncluttered pathways, and avoiding scatter rugs
- Consider whether you need limb protectors. Limb protectors are like thick sleeves or footless leggings and are designed to protect thin skin from tears and grazes.



Don't shower for too long



Apply moisturiser



Keep hydrated



Consider wearing limb protectors

Need support? Calvary Community Care can support safe, independent living at home with a variety of services and expert advice. Call 1300 66 00 22 for more information.

Who can help?

CCC Service centre staff can assist with extra help at home, and can provide information you may require in order to reduce your risk of injury.

Your doctor can prescribe supplements to assist with healthy skin, and refer you to other health professionals or any services for which you may be eligible.

Pharmacists for advice on the most effective creams etc. for your skin.

Your local Council

Independent Living Centre provides information about products and services to help people remain independent and improve their quality of life.
<http://ilcaustralia.org.au/> or ph. 1300 885 886.

References

Wounds UK Best practice statement
Care of the Older Person's skin.
<http://bit.ly/1INPMpA>

Kimberly LeBlanc, BScN, RN, ET, MN, IIWCC et al
Best Practice Recommendations for the Prevention and Treatment of Skin Tears
<http://bit.ly/2n64tWp>