

# Calvary Community Care Risky Business

Falls and Injury Prevention – How not to fall for it



We often don't notice normal changes as they happen very slowly over the years. Normal ageing does not need to involve falling. There are things you can do to reduce the risk.

**Normal ageing involves poorer eyesight – we may find we can't see quite as clearly, are less able to judge distances and depth or can't cope with sudden changes in light levels or glare. Worse balance, weaker muscles and stiffer joints, which change the way we walk and move around. Less feeling in the feet and legs, increased likelihood of pain and even changes to the shape and flexibility of our feet.**

## So how do you reduce your personal risk factors?

Talk to your doctor about any falls you have experienced. Don't just dismiss them as 'not concentrating', 'clumsiness' or dismiss the fall as a normal part of ageing so 'I'd better get used to it'. Falls can be a sign of a new medical problem, muscle weakness, balance problems, medication side effects or a combination of these and other problems. The problem which led to the fall may well be reversible. It will help your doctor if you have information about the time of day you fell, what you were doing and how you were feeling just before the fall.

Ways to reduce personal risk factors:

- Hazard proof your home and garden
- Increase bone and muscle strength
- Maintain a healthy and active lifestyle
- Have a medication review
- Ensure your vision problems are managed
- Have a plan in place in case you do fall
- Keep your bones and skin healthy.

## Public Places

Hazards also exist in environments away from your home. These include uneven, broken, loose or wet footpaths and poor lighting. To keep yourself as safe as possible:

- don't rush, take your time
- pay attention to your surroundings, including unsafe surfaces, obstacles, animals, children, cyclists or people on gophers. Scan the area before walking
- if you have a walking aid, use it
- if you have glasses or hearing aid, wear them
- wear safe shoes
- take extra care on buses, trams and trains. Have your fare or ticket ready before getting on and ask the driver not to move off until you are seated
- if you notice a hazard in a public place (e.g. footpath or shopping centre) you should consider reporting it to the appropriate authority. Many councils and shopping centres are grateful to be informed.

## Health problems that could increase your risk of falling

<b>Stroke, Parkinson's disease and Arthritis</b>	Can affect your ability to move and make it more difficult to react quickly and save yourself if you stumble. Stroke can also affect your ability to judge distance so e.g. you may attempt to sit in a chair and miss it altogether.
<b>Diabetes</b> (especially if with unstable blood sugar levels)	You may feel faint. Diabetes can also cause problems with eyesight, and reduce feeling in the feet and legs. These make it more difficult to move around safely. You may also feel confused.
<b>Depression. Dementia in all its forms</b> (Alzheimer's is only one in a list of many types of dementia)	Can make you less aware of your immediate surroundings and less able to react quickly. You may also feel confused and unable to make safe decisions.
<b>Postural Hypotension</b>	Can make you light-headed, dizzy or unsteady when you stand up quickly (see 'Dizziness and Loss of Balance').
<b>Dizziness and/or Vertigo</b>	Can make you very unsteady (see 'Dizziness and Loss of Balance').
<b>Incontinence</b> (problems holding on to your water and/or bowels i.e. bladder or bowel leakage)	You may need to hurry to the toilet. This can increase the risk of a fall, especially at night.
<b>Not eating well or enough, and not drinking enough</b>	Can mean you don't have the strength to move safely or manage daily activities easily. Dehydration can muddle your thinking. Drinking more than a small amount of alcohol can slow your reactions and make you unsteady.
<b>Short-term illnesses and surgery</b>	Can cause dizziness, confusion and difficulty walking while you are sick – and even for a few days after.

**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.**

The risk of falls and hip fractures increases with age especially if there is brittleness of the bones (osteoporosis), which is a widespread condition is occurring in elderly women and men (see also 'Not All Breaks Are Lucky').

The strongest predictors of risk of falling are previous falls (especially those causing injury) and a walking or balance difficulty increasing risk even further.

## Who can help?

**CCC Service centre** can assist with a home safety assessment and organise extra services.

**Your doctor** can provide regular check-ups to ensure your medical conditions are well managed. Your doctor may also refer you to other health professionals or any services for which you may be eligible.

**Dietitian** may recommend food supplements if you nutritional intake is not the best.

**Library** can help you keep yourself up to date with information about your medical conditions.

**Local Council** can assist with maintenance of your home to reduce some risk factors.

**For more information** about you're the medical conditions listed above contact the following support organisations:

**Parkinsons Association**

ph. 1800644189

<http://www.parkinsons.org.au/what-is-parkinsons>

**Alzheimers Australia**

ph. 1800100500

<https://www.fightdementia.org.au/about-dementia/what-is-dementia>

**Stroke Foundation**

ph. 1800 787 653

<https://strokefoundation.org.au/>

**Osteoporosis**

ph. 1800 242 141

<http://www.osteoporosis.org.au/>

**Diabetes Australia**

ph. 1300136588

<https://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au/>

**Arthritis Association**

ph. 1800 011 041

<http://www.arthritisaustralia.com.au>

**Continence Foundation of Australia National**

ph. 1800330066

<http://www.continence.org.au/pages/national-continence-helpline.html>

## References

**Revised and re-published by the Commonwealth of Australia 2011**

*'Don't Fall For It - A guide to preventing falls for older people*

<http://bit.ly/2ovW0vz>

**CDC Risk Factors for Falls**

<http://bit.ly/2oD2CFv>

**AFP The Elderly Dec 2012**

*'Falls Prevention in Older Adults Assessment and Management'*

<http://bit.ly/1kQw8xB>

**ACC New Zealand**

*'Standing up to falls. Your guide to preventing falls and protecting your independence'*

<http://bit.ly/2niHAgX>

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