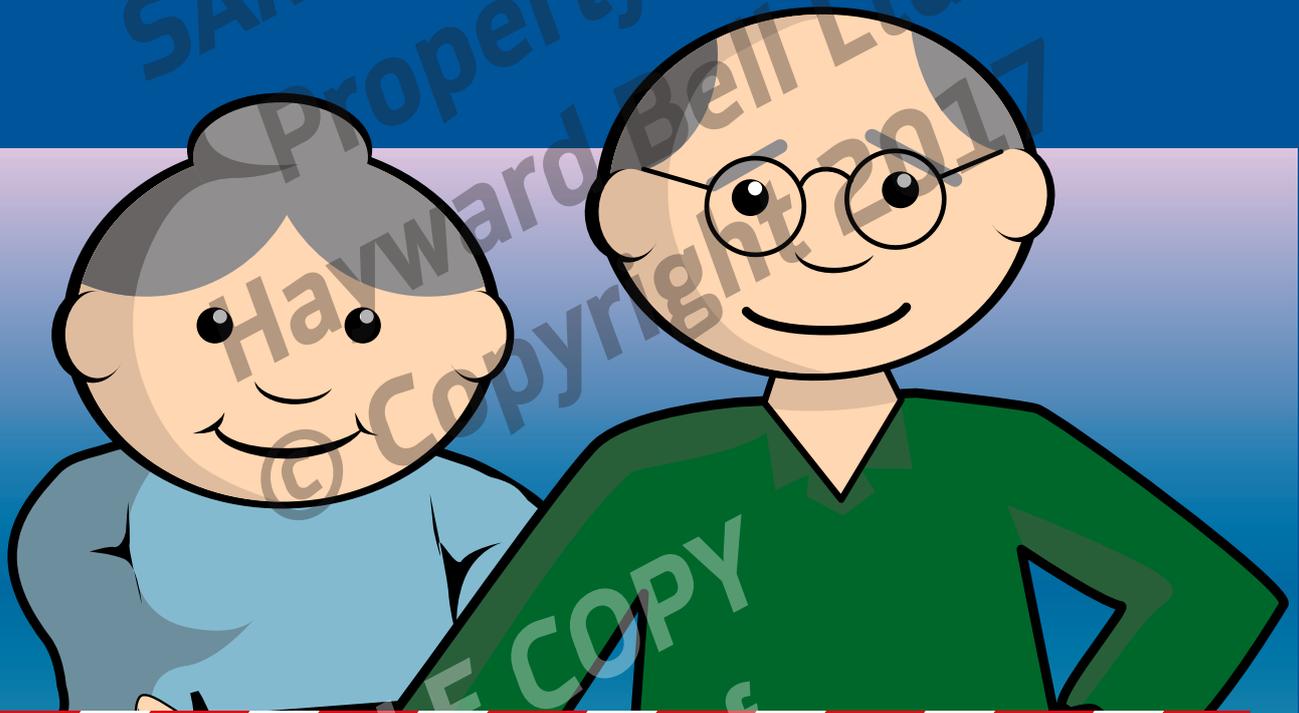


Putting Safety First



Ways to Prevent Falls

Putting Safety First

Ways to Prevent Falls

- ◆ The risk of falling is a common problem which can often be avoided by following a few safety tips.
- ◆ Experts in their field have contributed to this booklet so that the best and most up-to-date information is available for you.
- ◆ This booklet contains advice on what to do if you, or someone else falls.
- ◆ Keep this booklet handy so that you can be reminded of the advice.

Inside this pack you will find information on:

◆ General Safety	p2-7
◆ Medicines	p8
◆ Postural hypotension/dizziness	p9
◆ Vision and Hearing Loss	p10
◆ Exercise	p11
◆ Footwear & Footcare	p12
◆ Hydration	p13
◆ Osteoporosis	p14
◆ Diet	p15-17
◆ What to do after a fall	p18-19
◆ Contacts	p20

The important thing is that preventing falls is not just about hazards around you, but it is also about what you wear on your feet, what you eat, how active you are and what steps you take to prevent falls happening.

For more help and addresses see **Your Local Contacts** on the back page of this booklet.

Help Yourself to Health

Loss of confidence

If you have had a fall or are worried about falling there are some important things to remember:

- ◆ **Anyone can have a fall - you are not alone!**
- ◆ **Falling is frightening and people do feel less confident after a fall. Do you find that you:**
 1. **Are more careful with your walking, maybe slower or doing less?**
 2. **Are leaving the house less often, or not going as far?**
 3. **Are worried about what might happen if you fall again?**
- ◆ **Answering yes to one or all of these questions is common and may mean you have lost some confidence.**
- ◆ **But remember there are lots of things that you can do to reduce your risk of falling and improve your confidence.**
- ◆ **This booklet is full of ideas to help increase your confidence by taking control. Keep reading to learn what you can do to help yourself.**
- ◆ **If your concerns are affecting you a lot then speak to a member of the health care team.**

Hints and tips to reduce the risk of falling.

In your BATHROOM...



DON'T:

- ◆ Lock the bathroom door
- ◆ Have the water too hot

DO:

- ◆ Try to have someone in the house when you take a bath or shower. If this is not possible you could let someone know how long you think you will be. If they do not hear from you after an agreed time they can then check you are OK.
- ◆ Use a non-slip bath mat.
- ◆ Make sure you have everything you need, e.g. shampoos, soap, towels before you get into the water.

You may be eligible for help with the cost, use or fitting of support aids - find out which bathroom equipment can be fitted for you, such as grab rails or seats.

In your BEDROOM

DO:

- ◆ Make sure your bed is the right height for you and your mattress offers comfort and support.
- ◆ Have a light by the bed that can be switched on and off easily from the bed.
- ◆ Have a torch with good batteries by the bed in case of an emergency or power cut.
- ◆ Have a telephone extension or charged mobile phone by your bed in case of emergencies.

If you are part of a warden or home call service, remember to have your alarm call pendant, panic button or pull cord in easy reach.



In the HALL and on the STAIRWAY...

DO:

- ◆ Make sure halls and stairways are well lit with light switches on both levels.
- ◆ Keep stairs and walkways clear from obstructions and, if possible, fit stairs with two handrails.
- ◆ Do fit a cage or box to the inside of your letterbox if possible to save you bending down.



DON'T:

- ◆ Leave belongings and obstacles in your hallway or stairway that you could trip over

In the KITCHEN...

DO:

- ◆ Make sure work surfaces are clear and within easy reach in case you need to put hot or heavy items down quickly.
- ◆ Keep everyday items in easy reach - avoid storing things in high or low places.
- ◆ Use steps with handle grips for support if you do need to reach high cupboards. Do not balance on a stool or chair.
- ◆ Wipe up spills immediately, slippery floors can cause a fall.

DON'T:

- ◆ Reach up to high cupboards.
- ◆ Store everyday items too high or too low.
- ◆ Balance on a stool or chair.

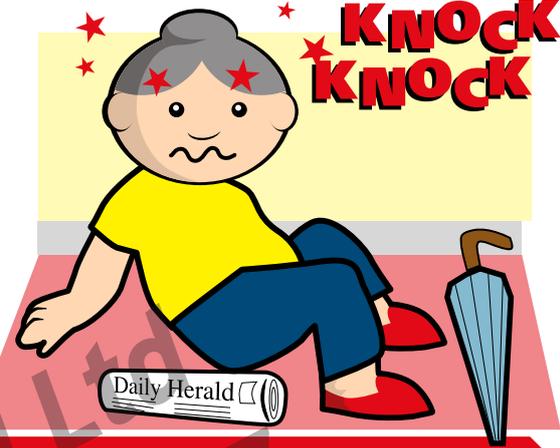
HEATING

- ◆ If you have a gas fire, try to have the controls and ignition switch fitted on top of your fire. A qualified gas engineer will be able to advise you if this is possible. Your utility company may also be able to offer free advice.

Answering the DOOR or TELEPHONE...

DO:

- ◆ Take your time - if the call is important they will wait. You can call out to let them know you have heard their knock/doorbell.
- ◆ Have an intercom fitted so you can talk to the caller before going to the door.
- ◆ Use an answer phone to take your calls - you can still speak to the caller when you reach the telephone.
- ◆ Use a portable phone (keep it fully charged) – remember it may not work during a power cut.



DON'T:

- ◆ Be tempted to hurry to the door or telephone.

Wear the right CLOTHING...

DO:

- ◆ Wear clothing that allows your legs and feet to move freely.

DON'T:

- ◆ Wear clothing that is too long or too tight.

Is your FURNITURE safe?..



DO:

- ◆ Arrange furniture so that it is stable and can't topple over.
- ◆ Remove casters from chairs to make them stable.
- ◆ Make sure you can move freely around the room - furniture should not be used as a walking aid.

DON'T:

- ◆ Lean on furniture which could move or topple over.
- ◆ Use furniture as a walking aid.

Good LIGHTING helps avoid falls...

DO:

- ◆ Keep rooms and stairways well lit.
- ◆ Use the brightest bulb available to you, to make it easier to see.
- ◆ Use long life bulbs - they can be left on longer and use less electricity. If you do not feel confident replacing a bulb ask for help, do not put yourself at risk.

CARPETS and RUGS...

DO:

- ◆ Make sure carpets and rugs are tacked down or removed if it makes the room safer.

WALKING AIDS...



DO:

- ◆ Make sure you use walking aids that are provided for you.
- ◆ Check the rubber at the base of your walking aid and change when worn down.

DON'T:

- ◆ Attempt to carry objects when using a walking frame - some aids are fitted with a caddy/tray for small items.

WIRES...

DO:

- ◆ Make sure all electric wires, telephone, television and computer cables are tucked away so you don't trip over them.

Safe use of MEDICINES...

Some medications may increase your risk of falling eg. anti-depressants, blood pressure tablets, sleeping tablets and other sedatives.

NOTE:

- ◆ **It is important you do not stop taking a medicine without first asking your doctor**

DO:

- ◆ Follow the instructions for taking your medicines.
- ◆ Check medicines are working and not causing you problems - regularly review your medication with your Doctor or Pharmacist (chemist).
- ◆ Ask your surgery about a medication review if you or someone you care for is struggling to take medicines as prescribed.
- ◆ Ask your surgery for a medication review if your treatment has changed recently and you are unsure about your medicines.
- ◆ Talk to your community Pharmacist (chemist) if you have difficulty opening child-resistant tops. They may be able to give you ordinary screw tops or different packaging.
- ◆ Be aware of feelings of dizziness or excessive drowsiness and speak to your doctor if you are concerned.
- ◆ Know your medicines - all medicines are supplied with patient information leaflets and provide details about possible side effects.
- ◆ Have an up to date list of your medications available.

DON'T:

- ◆ **Change the amount you have been told to take or take it at a different time without first discussing it with your Doctor or Pharmacist (chemist).**
- ◆ **Share or give your medicines to anyone else. They were prescribed for you and may be harmful to other people.**



Postural Hypotension/Dizziness...

Postural hypotension is a drop in blood pressure during a change in position. This reduces the amount of blood going to your brain and can cause symptoms of dizziness, falls and blackouts.

The fall in blood pressure can occur at any time and may happen after getting up from either lying or sitting positions.

The following measures will help you prevent this:

- ◆ See your GP to ensure that there are no medical reasons for your symptoms.
- ◆ Symptoms are likely to be at their worst in the morning when blood pressure is at its lowest. Take extra care at this time, especially getting up in the morning.
- ◆ Raise the head of the bed with pillows so you are not sleeping flat. This will help to reduce the change in position when you sit up.
- ◆ Get out of bed slowly. Exercising your arms and legs before sitting up and again before standing is often helpful.
- ◆ Remember to sit back down again if you feel dizzy, if possible lie flat.
- ◆ Do not rush off when you have stood up. Stand for a short period to make sure you do not feel dizzy. It may be beneficial to walk on the spot before moving away from the bed or chair.
- ◆ Some people can have bigger drops in blood pressure after large meals. It may be beneficial to have five or six smaller meals rather than three large ones.
- ◆ Try not to sit or stand in one position for too long particularly when it is hot.
- ◆ If you have to stand for long periods then try pumping your heels up and down (standing on tip-toes if you are able) to encourage blood flow.
- ◆ Ensure you drink plenty of fluids throughout the day, one and a half to two litres are recommended daily amounts.
- ◆ Your doctor may advise you to increase your salt intake.
- ◆ You may be prescribed compression hosiery.
- ◆ Your doctor may prescribe you new medication or alter your existing medications.

VISION and HEARING loss...

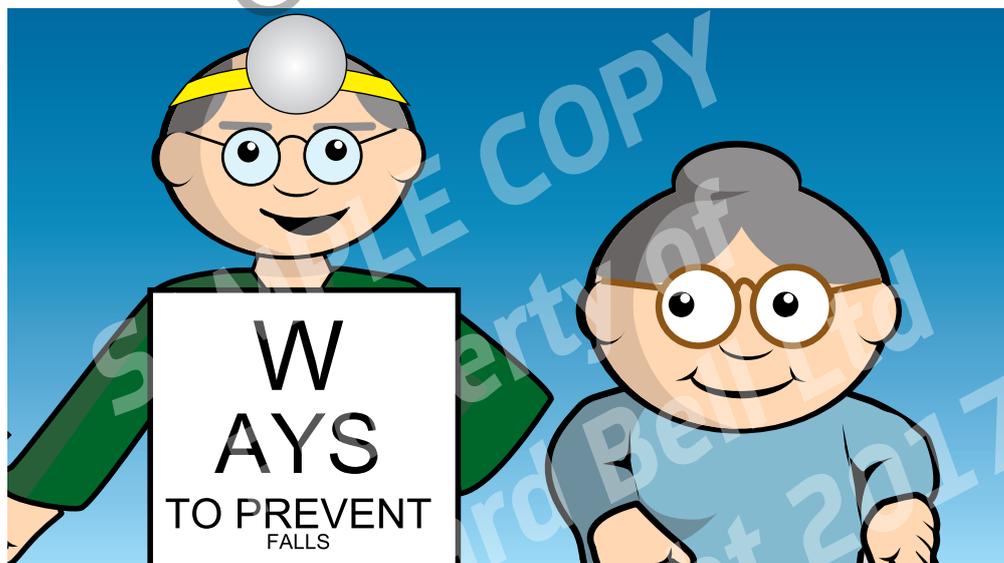
You can experience falls due to sight or hearing loss

VISION

DO:

- ◆ Have your eyesight checked regularly. If you are aged 60 or over your eyesight tests should be free. You may also qualify for help towards the cost of your glasses.
- ◆ Remember to wear your glasses and keep them clean and in good condition.
- ◆ Contact your optician to ask if they can visit you if you are housebound.
- ◆ Take care on steps and stairs when you wear your glasses especially if you wear varifocals or bifocals.

If you are registered blind or partially sighted there is a range of support available from your NHS eye department, Social Services and a range of dedicated charities.



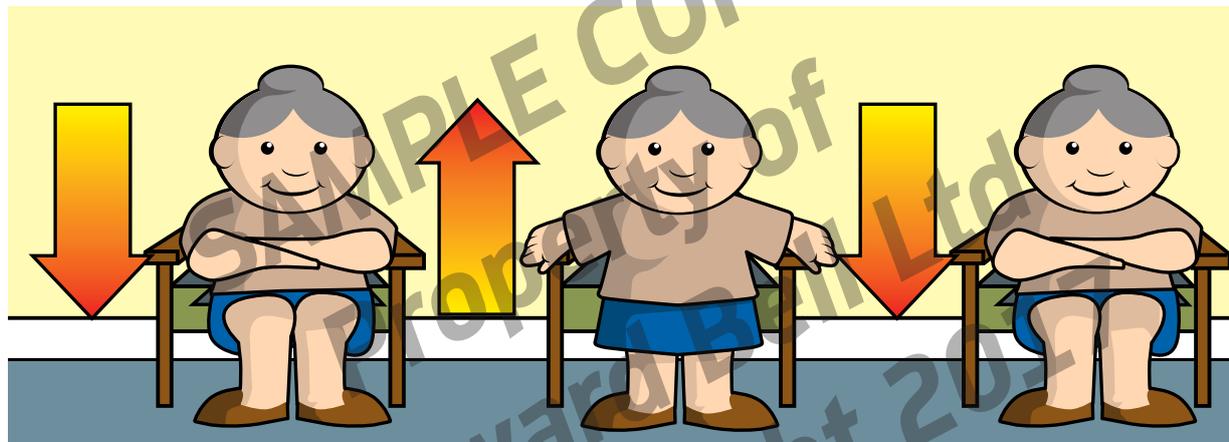
HEARING loss...

DO:

- ◆ See your Doctor if you have difficulty with hearing. They can refer you to hospital for checks.
- ◆ Make sure you attend regular appointments with audiology if you already wear a hearing aid.
- ◆ Maintain your hearing aid, keep it clean and replace batteries regularly.
- ◆ Home hearing tests are also available

Lead an active lifestyle

Stay fit for life



DO:

- ◆ Regular exercise. Exercise and movement can prevent the risk of falling.
- ◆ Regular physical activity, such as walking, helps to strengthen muscles and bones.
- ◆ Follow the recommended level of exercise, depending on your general health.
- ◆ Always check with your Doctor, Nurse or Therapist before starting a new type of physical activity or returning to exercise after a break. They can also help provide advice on diet and nutrition.
- ◆ Build up to walks that last half an hour, four times a week, if physically able. Ideally a short walk everyday is your goal. Walking regularly can be just as beneficial as bursts of strenuous activity.
- ◆ Remember to warm up and cool down with some gentle stretching.
- ◆ Wear loose fitting clothing and suitable footwear. Walking sticks can be a useful aid to balance.
- ◆ Try and plan a route that has things to see and benches at vantage points for rests, if you need them.
- ◆ Tell someone where you are going and when to expect you back.
- ◆ Ask your Doctor, Nurse or Therapist if they have 'GP Referral Scheme'. Often the provision is available at a reduced cost or free. Some Doctors prescribe exercise at participating gyms.
- ◆ Check with your local gym or class provider for information about exercise classes. There are a range of types suitable for all ages and abilities such as aerobics, pilates, gentle exercise.

Regular arm and leg movements can be achieved while sitting in a chair. Swimming pools also provide sessions and are able to support individuals with limited mobility.

DON'T:

- ◆ **Exercise if you are tired, ill or just after eating. Try not to overdo it, build things up gradually.**
- ◆ **Make sudden or jerky movements such as tipping or turning your head. Standing up quickly can cause dizziness.**

FOOTWEAR and FOOTCARE

As we get older our feet often start to protest about the way we have treated them over the years - so it's important to take good care of them.

The following will help you to care for your feet and may help to reduce the risk of falling.

FOOTWEAR:

- ◆ Take care of our feet and choose the right footwear for support.
- ◆ Ask to have your feet measured when buying new footwear. Shoes, boots and slippers should fit properly. The size and shape of our feet can alter throughout our life.
- ◆ Choose footwear that protects and supports with non-slip soles, this will reduce the risk of slipping on some surfaces.
- ◆ It is important you feel safe and secure when you walk. Fastenings such as laces, buckles and velcro help to secure your feet inside your footwear.
- ◆ Ensure natural foot movement when you walk. Shoes with soft uppers, high sides and an enclosed heel help to provide this. Avoid footwear with spongy soles.

Good simple footcare is important

IF YOU ARE ABLE TO MANAGE YOUR OWN FOOT CARE:

- ◆ Wash your feet daily in warm soapy water, rinse and dry with a soft towel taking care to dry between your toes.
- ◆ Use a foot file to remove dry, hard skin and rub moisturising cream into the soles and heels of your feet.
- ◆ Trim your toe nails at least once a month. Always cut them straight across without cutting down the sides of the nail.
- ◆ If you are finding it difficult to manage your foot care, you can see a podiatrist/chiroprapist or arrange for one to visit you at home.

DON'T:

- ◆ **Ignore minor foot troubles. They are unlikely to get better by themselves. If you are in any doubt, see your Doctor or see a State Registered Chiroprapist or Podiatrist especially if you have diabetes mellitus.**

STAYING HYDRATED

How are you feeling?

Do you suffer from headaches, dizziness, confusion or tiredness. You may need to drink more water and discuss these symptoms with a Health Professional.

Is your urine clear?

Check against these colours.



Staying well-hydrated will improve your overall health and reduce your risk of illness, falls and infection. Checking the colour of your urine is one way of telling if you are drinking enough. Dark, strong smelling urine maybe an indication your body is dehydrated or you have an urine infection. If in doubt get it checked out.

Ideally it should be a pale straw colour – the clearer the better.

For our bodies to function well we need to drink regularly throughout the day. Some drinks are more effective hydrators - water is excellent.

As a general guide:

- ◆ Aim to drink between 1.5 and 2.5 litres (2.5 - 4 pints) of fluid a day, unless otherwise advised by a Health Professional.
- ◆ Roughly 6 - 8 glasses (x 250ml). Can be taken in a variety of hot and cold drinks (limit alcohol) and keep the balance right. Aim for at least 4 glasses of water a day.
- ◆ Keep caffeinated drinks to a minimum.
- ◆ Try changing to caffeine free tea or coffee.
- ◆ Tap water is an ideal choice. It is free and contains no sugars or calories.
- ◆ Milk, fruit juice and squash are good alternatives to water.
- ◆ Being dehydrated affects blood pressure and can increase your risks of falls.

OSTEOPOROSIS...

Osteoporosis is a common condition where bones have become very fragile and weak making them easy to break. There are many factors that may increase your risk of osteoporosis, such as.

- ◆ A broken bone after a minor bump or fall.
- ◆ A family history of a broken hip after a minor bump or fall.
- ◆ Undergoing the menopause before the age of 45.
- ◆ Taking corticosteroid tablets (cortisone, prednisolone) for more than 6 months.
- ◆ A loss of height of more than 5 cm.
- ◆ Irregular periods (stopped for 12 months or more for reasons other than pregnancy or the menopause).
- ◆ Drinking heavily.
- ◆ Frequently suffering from diarrhoea (caused by problems such as Coeliac disease or Crohn's disease).

Suffering from certain medical conditions such as:

- ◆ Rheumatoid arthritis.
- ◆ Malabsorption syndrome.
- ◆ Chronic kidney disease.
- ◆ Liver disease.
- ◆ Low testosterone levels in men.

Having one or more of these factors may make you at risk of osteoporosis. Your Doctor or Practice Nurse can advise regarding further tests or treatment if necessary, consult them if you are concerned. If diagnosed with osteoporosis treatments are available to help strengthen bones.

To protect your bones...

DO:

- ◆ Stop smoking as this can damage the bone building cells in the body.
- ◆ Keep your alcohol intake low. Excessive alcohol can destroy bones and make you unsteady.
- ◆ Try to take some sort of exercise – see our section on 'Stay fit for life'.
- ◆ Try to go outdoors often, as daylight is an important source of vitamin D, essential for strong bones.
- ◆ Eat a well balanced diet – see the next section on 'Diet'.

Does your diet make a difference?

YES! - what you eat makes a difference, it is important to eat a well-balanced diet to take in all the protein, vitamins, minerals and other nutrients your body requires.

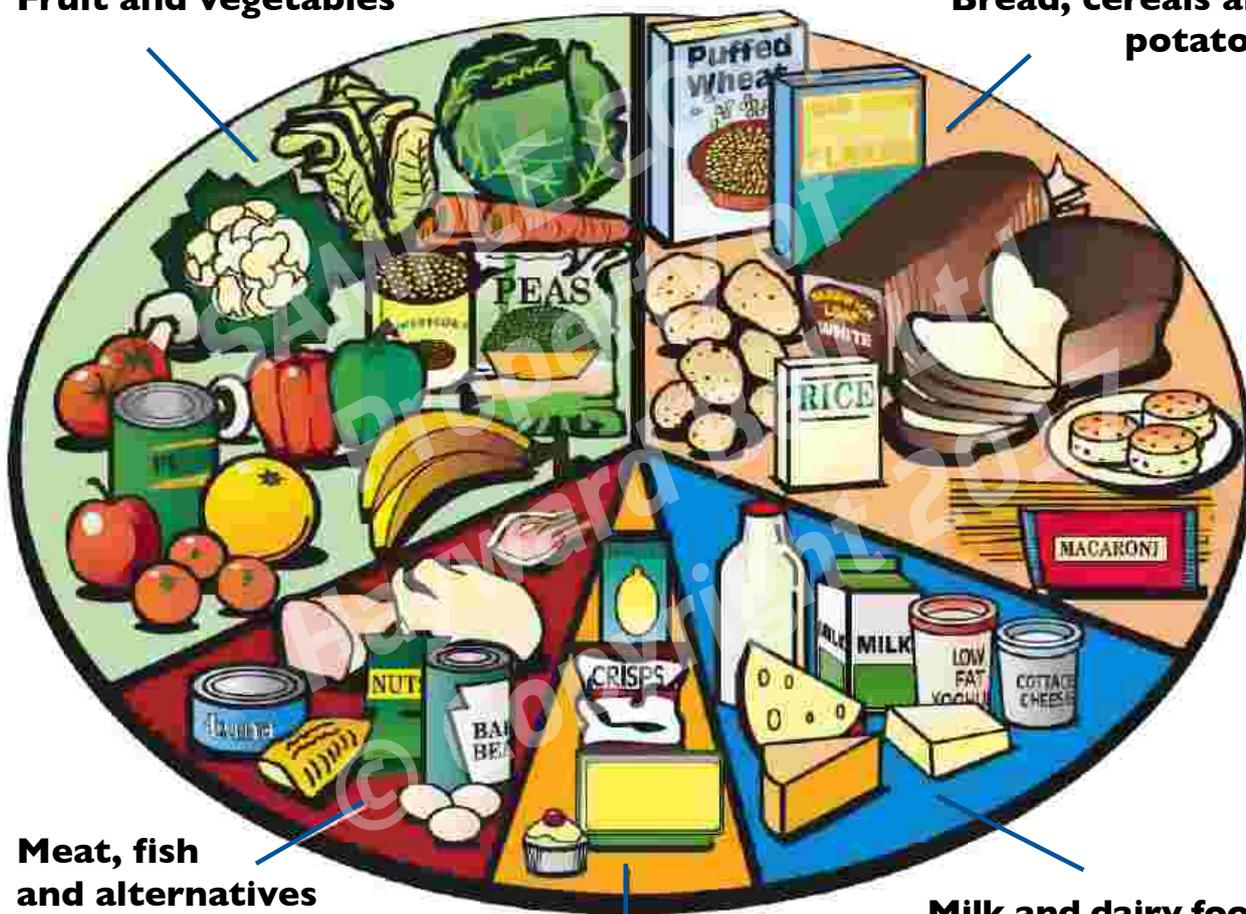
Eating a well-balanced diet helps to keep bones and muscles healthy and in good working order. Having strong bones helps to prevent falls.

The diagram below shows the proportions of food you should eat to achieve a healthy, balanced diet.

Your weekly meal plan should use some of the foods below to give a varied, interesting and portion controlled diet. It may be beneficial to have five or six smaller meals rather than three large ones.

Fruit and vegetables

Bread, cereals and potatoes



Meat, fish and alternatives

**Foods containing fat,
Foods containing sugar**

Milk and dairy foods

CALCIUM and VITAMIN D are particularly important nutrients...

CALCIUM

A good supply of calcium is essential for the development of strong, healthy bones and for the prevention of soft/brittle bones (known as osteoporosis) in later life.

Milk and dairy foods are the richest sources of calcium. These include:

- ◆ **Milk**
- ◆ **Cheese**
- ◆ **Yoghurts**
- ◆ **Fromage frais**
- ◆ **Milky puddings**

Other sources of calcium include:

- ◆ **Fish with soft bones (sardines, salmon and pilchards)**
- ◆ **Dried fruits (apricots, prunes, raisins and dates)**
- ◆ **Dark leafy green vegetables**
- ◆ **Kidney beans and lentils**
- ◆ **Bread, especially white bread**
- ◆ **Nuts**

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is needed by your body to absorb the calcium from your diet. The main source of vitamin D comes from the action of sunlight on your skin, so try to spend some time in the sunlight every day. If this is not possible, vitamin D can also be obtained from certain foods.

Food sources of vitamin D include:

- ◆ Margarine
- ◆ Eggs
- ◆ Liver
- ◆ Oily fish (pilchards, mackerel, salmon and sardines)
- ◆ Breakfast cereals.



What should I do if I have a fall?

What to do:

- ◆ Be prepared - knowing what to do could be life saving.
- ◆ Try to keep calm, if you have a panic button - call for help even if you think you are OK.
- ◆ Check to see if you are near a telephone to call for help. If in doubt call the emergency services. If your phone has 'speed dial' buttons have them programmed so you do not have to remember phone numbers if you are in pain or shock.
- ◆ If your neighbours may hear - try calling for help. You may want to place a key with them for safe keeping in case of emergencies. Consider having a Key Safe installed.
- ◆ Check to see if you are injured. There are first aid booklets available to help you prepare for minor injuries.
- ◆ Check the area for any items you may have dropped and broken. You do not want to cause further injury by moving.
- ◆ You may want to try getting up from the floor. Think about how you can do this in stages, moving so you are nearer a chair, settee or stairs first. Then get on your hands and knees before getting up.
- ◆ Try and keep warm, see if there is a blanket, coat or towel nearby that you can use.



What should I do if Somebody else has a fall?

What to do:

- ◆ Be prepared - knowing what to do could be life saving.
 - S** - **S**top
 - T** - **T**ime. Give yourself **T**ime to think
 - O** - **O**bserve the situation
 - P** - **P**rotect yourself, do not put yourself in danger
- ◆ Try to **Keep calm**
- ◆ **Check for danger** - are there signs of any liquids or broken items such as glass or crockery. Do not put yourself in danger.
- ◆ **Check the casualty for a response.**
 - Q: Are they alert and aware of visuals or vocal sounds?
 - Q: Are there any obvious signs that they are in pain?
 - Q: Can they tell you what happened?
 - Q: Are they unresponsive i.e. asleep or unconscious?
- ◆ **Call for help** - Dial 999, sound the panic button if the casualty is part of a warden scheme or call for a neighbour.
- ◆ **Follow the advice given by the emergency services** to check and make the casualty comfortable.
- ◆ **Keep** the casualty calm, warm and reassured until help arrives.

DON'T:

- ◆ **Give them anything to eat or drink.**
- ◆ **Put yourself at risk - call for help.**

And Finally.....

When the weather is cold, you can easily suffer from hypothermia if the temperature of your home is not maintained. Falls that occur during cold weather, particularly if you are lying on the ground for even a short period of time, can result in serious consequences.

Tips for keeping warm

- Ensure your home is heated to no lower than 21°C
- Keep internal doors closed to stop draughts
- Have at least one hot meal per day and have plenty of hot drinks
- Layer up - many layers of clothing are best
- Use a regularly serviced electric blanket or heat pad
- Close curtains at dusk
- Keep your heating on overnight and close windows
- Contact your energy supplier and find out about Social Tariffs or Priority Register Schemes
- Ensure your home is well insulated and your boiler is serviced regularly

If you have a fall

If you have a fall it is important that you tell your GP or another healthcare professional you may be in contact with.

Useful contact information

***Place your own
contact information here***