

Age UK is the new force combining

**AGE** and **HELP THE AGED** **WE WILL**  
*Concern*

# Falls Awareness Week 2011 Watch your step!

20-24 June



## Action Pack

*Falls Awareness Week is  
an opportunity for us to  
encourage people in later  
life to find out more about  
falls prevention and take  
part in local activities to  
reduce their risk of falling.*



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# Falls Awareness Week 2011

Having a fall in later life is a concern for many of us. As we get older the risk of having a fall increases and the consequences can be more serious, both physically and emotionally.

It is not just falls themselves that have an impact on our quality of life. The fear of falling can have a devastating effect on confidence – limiting daily living activities and reducing independence. But falls are not an inevitable part of ageing and much can be done to reduce the risks.

Falls Awareness Week is an opportunity for us to encourage people in later life to find out more about falls prevention and take part in local activities to reduce their risk of falling. Last year, over 1,200 events took place around the UK encouraging people to ‘Get Up and Go’ to help reduce falls. This year, we are asking you to ‘Watch Your Step’ and organise or promote activities which help people in later life reduce their risk of falling.

We hope you will join us between 20 and 24 June to raise awareness of the link between reduced vision and falls, and to encourage people in later life to take simple steps to prevent falls and improve their quality of life.

Registering your falls awareness event is easy. Simply complete the form at the back of this pack or go to **[www.ageuk.org.uk/fallsday](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/fallsday)** and complete your registration online. Once registered, you can access information and support from us, and order promotional materials to help get your event noticed.

For more information on Falls Awareness Week 2011, visit **[www.ageuk.org.uk/fallsday](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/fallsday)** email **[falls@ageuk.org.uk](mailto:falls@ageuk.org.uk)** or call **0800 169 87 87**







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# Why ‘Watch Your Step’?

Although many factors may contribute to falls it has been shown that problems with vision are among the most important.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to reduced vision causing obvious difficulties in spotting hazards and obstacles or negotiating steps and uneven ground, it can also affect balance, co-ordination and mobility, and accelerate a reduction in muscle strength, which increases a person’s risk of falling.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Reduced vision can affect balance, co-ordination and mobility.

By focusing on the link between vision and falls we hope you will be able to promote our three key messages:

### Eye-health

Eye-health checks are a vital part of looking after ourselves, especially as we get older.

### The right glasses

Wearing the right glasses at the right times can reduce our risk of falling.

### Simple changes

Simple changes to our lifestyle and environment can improve vision and help prevent falls.



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<sup>1</sup> *The Importance of Vision in Preventing Falls*, British Geriatric Society and College of Optometrists, 2003

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# What do we want?

Falls Awareness Week 2011 is an opportunity to raise the profile of activities and projects that help to prevent falls in later life and promote the link between vision and falls.

We want to:

## **Promote early detection of sight problems through regular eye-health checks**

Many older people are unaware that they have sight problems or that many sight problems are treatable.<sup>2</sup> Having regular eye-health checks is a simple step we can all take that may prevent falls.

## **Raise awareness of the importance of wearing the right glasses**

It has been estimated that as much as 30 per cent of visual impairment in people over 75 is the result of wearing the wrong glasses or no glasses at all.<sup>3</sup> Many people wear bifocals or varifocals, which help them to see clearly at all distances. These are often very convenient, but there is evidence to suggest that these types of glasses increase the risk of falling on stairs by blurring step edges.<sup>4</sup>

## **Promote the fact that simple changes can make a big difference**

We can all make small changes to improve or maintain our vision. Simple measures, such as checking that glasses are cleaned regularly or ensuring that lighting in the home is at a correct level, can make a big difference.

Eating a balanced diet may help our eyes remain healthy and protect against some eye diseases, as well as guarding against many other health conditions. Remember, making small adjustments in our daily life doesn't mean that we have to limit our activities. In fact, changes can give us greater freedom and confidence.

We hope you will join us and hold an event during Falls Awareness Week to promote these messages.

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<sup>2</sup> NB magazine, RNIB, 2009

<sup>3</sup> *The Importance of Vision in Preventing Falls*, British Geriatric Society and College of Optometrists, 2003

<sup>4</sup> NB magazine, RNIB, 2009

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# Vision and falls

Falls are the most frequent and serious type of accident in older people, with up to one in three over-65s falling each year.<sup>5</sup>

People in later life who have sight loss are not only more likely to fall, but are also at increased risk of multiple falls. In a project by the charity Visibility in 2009, over a third of participants mentioned that they had fallen or tripped as a result of their sight loss.<sup>6</sup>

Many of the sight problems contributing to the risk of falls in older people are often unidentified or ignored, both by people themselves and the professionals caring for them, but many are correctable or treatable.

Much of the healthy living advice that is promoted today has a positive impact on vision and falls prevention.

For example:

## Diet

It is thought that a healthy diet, rich in dark leafy green vegetables, oily fish and vitamins A, C and E can safeguard eye-health.

[www.visionmatters.org.uk](http://www.visionmatters.org.uk)

## Exercise

Exercise may reduce the risk of sight loss from narrowing or hardening of the arteries, high blood pressure and diabetes. In addition, poor eyesight can have a detrimental effect on balance and co-ordination, but targeted exercise can improve strength and balance.

[www.visionmatters.org.uk](http://www.visionmatters.org.uk)

## Smoking

After ageing, smoking is the biggest risk factor for developing macular degeneration.

[www.visionmatters.org.uk](http://www.visionmatters.org.uk)

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5 *Falls in the Over-65s*, Age UK, 2010

6 See [www.visibility.org.uk/what-we-do/research/Falls-Report.pdf](http://www.visibility.org.uk/what-we-do/research/Falls-Report.pdf)



Many people are unaware that everyone aged 60 or over is entitled to free NHS eye tests. Everyone should have their eyesight tested at least once every two years. Optometrists often recommend that people aged 70 and over have a test every year.

If someone is unable to get to a community optometrist to get their eyes tested because of physical or mental health problems or a disability, they can ask for a domiciliary eye test, where an optometrist will visit them at home. The local primary care trust (PCT) or health board will have details of optometrists who offer domiciliary visits.

See our advice Guides, *Staying Steady: Improving your strength and balance* and *Looking after your eyes*, for more information. All our guides can be ordered free of charge by calling **0800 169 65 65**.

### Interesting facts

- 98 per cent of people aged 65 and over wear glasses.<sup>7</sup>
- 83 per cent of people living with sight loss are over 60.<sup>8</sup>
- 6 million older people in the UK do not have regular eye tests.<sup>9</sup>
- The rate of falls in people in later life with visual impairment is 1.7 times higher than those without visual impairment.<sup>10</sup>
- Age is the highest risk factor for developing some of the most common eye conditions (AMD, glaucoma, cataracts) that can lead to blindness.<sup>11</sup>
- In the UK, 50 per cent of people over 75 have symptoms of AMD.<sup>12</sup>



7 General Household Survey, 1986

8 Access Economics, *Future Sight Loss UK 1: Economic impact of partial sight and blindness in the UK adult population*, RNIB, 2009

9 *Older People and Eye Tests*, RNIB, 2007

10 'Are We Blind to Injuries in the Visually Impaired? A review of the literature', R. Legood et al., *Injury Prevention*, 8(2), June 2002

11 *Older People and Eye Tests*, RNIB, 2007

12 *Older People and Eye Tests*, RNIB, 2007



# Holding an event?

There are lots of different ways to draw attention to the issue of falling and to highlight the links between falls and vision.

Whatever you decide to do, use our 'wrong glasses' template to make it fun and make sure you get noticed. The template can be found in the back of this pack – simply photocopy on to card, cut out and decorate.

You could even use this as an activity at your event.



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# Who can take part?

There are a wide range of organisations that take part in Falls Awareness Week including falls prevention and other NHS teams, pharmacies, libraries, care homes and community organisations.

The following sections outline some examples of involvement. For more ideas, take a look at the evaluation reports from previous Falls Awareness Weeks at [www.ageuk.org.uk/fallsday](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/fallsday)

## Falls teams

Undertake some research to find out whether poor vision was a factor in your patients' falls, and how much they know about vision services. You could also promote knowledge in your team about the importance of screening for visual impairment and assessment of visual field. Get in touch with vision clinics to run joint events and promote the importance of two-way referral.

You could also promote the work of your team by inviting your commissioner or a local MP to your event to highlight the value of your service.

## GP surgeries and clinics

Many of the older people accessing services in your practice may be at risk of falls. You could use Falls Awareness Week to raise awareness of some of the risk factors and signpost local services or organisations that can help.

In addition, proper maintenance of diseases that affect the eyes, such as glaucoma and diabetes, can help to preserve residual vision. You may decide to promote awareness of these conditions during Falls Awareness Week. Joining forces with other organisations may help you in your activities.

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## Optometrists and opticians

Opticians or optometrist practices on the high street are ideally placed to reach a wide audience with messages about vision and falls, and in particular about the importance of having regular eye-health checks. Some of the main reasons why people in later life do not have regular eye tests are:

- a lack of awareness that regular eye tests are important, even for people who aren't currently experiencing problems with their eyes
- the perceived costs involved
- problems with transport.

You could focus your activities on raising awareness of these issues by letting people know if they are entitled to free eye tests and, if they cannot get to an optician, how they can access eye tests in their own homes, as well as information about help with the costs of glasses. You could also signpost to other services and activities in your area, for example, by giving information on how people can access low-vision services, aids and adaptations.

Alternatively, host an event in your practice and invite a member of your local falls team or a representative from the local voluntary organisation along.

## Community and voluntary organisations

If you belong to an organisation for people in later life, make sure that you involve them in any activities and get them to lead by example. You are likely to get a much better response if your message is coming from older people themselves.

You could join forces with other organisations, such as falls teams or high street opticians, to jointly promote activities. Your local falls team can be contacted via your PCT. If you are unable to hold an event yourself, you could help signpost to services in your area with a display or offer an advice session.



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## Care homes

People living in care homes are three times more likely to fall than older people living in the community. In addition, many older people in care homes are at risk of having their eye problems overlooked.

Activities in Falls Awareness Week could include providing information to improve the take-up of regular eye tests, such as reminding residents about their eligibility for free NHS eye tests. (All people over 60 are eligible for a free NHS eye test.) NHS domiciliary examinations are available free of charge to those unable to attend a community optometric practice because of illness or disability, so you could encourage residents to book a test with an optometrist who would be willing to come to your premises.

Your PCT will have details of domiciliary optometrists in your area. You could also ask staff to think more about what it would be like to live with impaired vision, challenging them to make improvements to the residents' environment, such as ensuring that there are no trip hazards or adjusting lighting. Staff may also like to test how effective use of colour contrast or a change of texture between surfaces can make the environment safer. It can help people recognise the edges between surfaces and perceive depth and difference more easily.

More ideas can be found in the resources section of this pack.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

People living in care homes are three times more likely to fall than people living in the community.





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# ***Holding an event – ideas for activities***

There are lots of different ways you can promote our three key messages. Here are a few ideas:

## **Eye-health**

- Ensure that people in later life in your area are aware of their entitlement to a free NHS eye test and know how to access services. Put up posters or display boards to give the correct local information.
- Hold a quiz to find out how much people know about eye services and the importance of regular eye checks.
- Educate professionals working with older people and the public about the impact that different eye conditions can have on vision. You could buy or rent ‘Simspecs’, which are glasses that simulate different eye conditions, and encourage staff or members of the public to better understand the difficulties experienced because of low vision. See the ‘Resources’ section for more details.

## **The right glasses at the right time**

- Raise awareness of the problems that multifocal glasses can cause. Promote the idea of having different glasses for different activities.
- Wearing glasses with outdated prescriptions can increase the risk of falls. Many people have old pairs of glasses at home that are no longer suitable. Hold a ‘spectacles amnesty’, where people can donate their unsuitable glasses to charity. Many opticians, charity shops and some supermarkets have deposit points for unwanted glasses and will pass them on to a good cause.
- Use our ‘wrong glasses’ template to make a colourful impact at your event. Give your event an intergenerational focus by inviting your local school or youth group to make and wear the glasses to promote your event.

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## Simple changes

- Rustle up some eye-friendly foods to serve at your event. The College of Optometrists has a range of simple recipes which are a 'Feast for the Eyes'. See the 'Useful websites' section for more details.
- Hold an activity taster session to demonstrate simple exercises, which help improve strength, balance and co-ordination. Promote the idea that while impaired vision may mean we experience more difficulty in maintaining balance, there are lots of simple things we can do to help us stay steady on our feet.
- Hold a 'Grimy Glasses Lens Cleanse'. Many people don't clean their glasses on a regular basis and dirt, scratches, fingerprints or smears can lessen the effects of the lenses. Offer to clean people's glasses, showing them the correct technique for doing so. You may be able to team up with an optician to offer free or low-cost lens-cleaning cloths.
- Offer home checks to help identify trip or fall hazards for people with low vision. You may be able to team up with a local voluntary organisation that already offers such a service.
- Get in touch with your local authority's sensory support team. It may wish to participate or help you produce an advice sheet offering practical tips to help people with sight loss move safely around their home and outdoors.

**Check the events list on our website to find out what other people have planned. Many of the activities can be incorporated into an information stand or display.**







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# Planning your event – what next?

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## 01

Decide on your falls awareness activity or project.

You may want to involve people in later life in your discussions and project. Encouraging older people to lead by example will be effective; they can address barriers and issues of concern with first-hand experience and understanding. Check out the **fit as a fiddle** programme ([www.fitasafiddle.org.uk](http://www.fitasafiddle.org.uk)) for ideas and information on peer mentoring.

## 02

Register your event with us by completing the form in this pack.

Alternatively, you can register online at [www.ageuk.org.uk/fallsday](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/fallsday)

You will be able to use this form to place an order for promotional resources. Resources will be sent to your organisation address from 18 April 2011. Orders sent after 3 June 2011 will not be processed.

## 03

Look out for further information, including factsheets, resources and up-to-date research.

Once you have registered and provided your email address, you will start to receive our Falls Awareness Week e-newsletters, containing helpful tips and reminders, as well as information on any additional resources.

Don't forget to look at our online map of events to see if other groups in your area are organising activities. Consider getting in touch to team up and combine forces or to jointly publicise your events. You could also encourage participation and reach new audiences by advertising your event with your local:

- optician or optometrist practice
- Age UK/Age Concern
- radio station
- council
- library
- older people's forum.

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# Resources

## Falls Prevention Tip Sheets

The National Ageing Research Institute in Victoria, Australia, has produced a series of falls prevention tip sheets. Sheet 7 focuses on vision: [www.health.vic.gov.au/agedcare/maintaining/falls/downloads/fptipsheets.doc](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/agedcare/maintaining/falls/downloads/fptipsheets.doc)

## A Feast for Your Eyes

The College of Optometrists has produced a series of recipes to help maintain eye-health at [www.lookafteryoureyes.org/en/campaigns/feast\\_for\\_your\\_eyes](http://www.lookafteryoureyes.org/en/campaigns/feast_for_your_eyes)



## Deteriorating Vision, Falls and Older People: The links

This report was published in 2005 by the charity Visibility. It can be downloaded at [www.visibility.org.uk/what-we-do/research/Falls-Report.pdf](http://www.visibility.org.uk/what-we-do/research/Falls-Report.pdf)

## The Importance of Vision in Preventing Falls

The British Geriatrics Society and the College of Optometrists produced this joint policy statement which gives comprehensive information on the causes of visual impairment in older people, and discusses the problems in take-up and provision of eye care services. It also has recommendations for good practice and service provision. Available from [www.bgs.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=410:visionpreventingfalls&catid=47:fallsandbones&Itemid=258](http://www.bgs.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=410:visionpreventingfalls&catid=47:fallsandbones&Itemid=258)



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## Who's Who in Health Services

Directgov is the website of the UK Government. The site has up-to-date information on a wide range of services, including information on who is eligible for free eye tests, how social services can provide help and where to go for information on visual aids and adaptations: [www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/HealthAndSupport/WhosWhoInHealthServices/index.htm](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/HealthAndSupport/WhosWhoInHealthServices/index.htm)

## Simspecs

Visual Impairment North East (VINE) offers a simulation package that consists of several sets of spectacles which, when worn, can give some idea of what a visually impaired person may see. They help to identify some of the problems experienced by the visually impaired. More details can be found at [www.vine-simspecs.org.uk](http://www.vine-simspecs.org.uk)

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**VINE offer a simulation package consisting of spectacles which, when worn, can give some idea of what a visually impaired person may see.**

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## Easy Read Information

See Ability offers information and advice to people who are blind or partially sighted and have other disabilities. Its easy-to-read factsheets on eye care can be downloaded at [www.lookupinfo.org/easy\\_read\\_information](http://www.lookupinfo.org/easy_read_information)

## *Housing for People with Sight Loss: A practical guide to improving existing homes, Good Practice Guide 4, June 2009*

A guide produced by the Thomas Pocklington Trust that shows ways in which routine maintenance and refurbishment can improve and make the environment around the home safer for people with sight loss. It can be downloaded from [www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/OneStopCMS/Core/CrawlerResourceServer.aspx?resource=B556F655-8C19-4933-9318-539C967DA3C7&mode](http://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/OneStopCMS/Core/CrawlerResourceServer.aspx?resource=B556F655-8C19-4933-9318-539C967DA3C7&mode)



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# Guides and exercise resources

Age UK produces a range of guides, including *Staying Steady: Improving your strength and balance* and *Looking after your eyes*, which are available to download from [www.ageuk.org.uk/publications](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/publications). All our guides can also be ordered free of charge by calling **0800 169 65 65**.

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Exercise resources include the following:

## **Strength and Balance Exercises for Healthy Ageing**

(A4 tabletop display aid for use with small groups) Demonstrating exercises to help maintain strength and balance: **£6 plus p&p**.

Also available to download at [www.ageuk.org.uk/publications](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/publications)

## **Be Strong, Be Steady** (DVD)

A complete and progressive programme of chair-based and standing exercises which will help strengthen muscles, increase flexibility and improve balance: **£12 plus p&p**.

## **Step to the Future** (DVD)

Combines two levels of aerobic endurance and strength and balance exercises, including standing, chair-based and floor work, for active older people: **£12 plus p&p**.

To place an order, call **0800 169 65 65**.



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# Useful websites

## **Age UK**

[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

## **College of Optometrists eye health advice**

[www.lookafteryoureyes.org](http://www.lookafteryoureyes.org)

## **fit as a fiddle programme**

[www.fitasafiddle.org.uk](http://www.fitasafiddle.org.uk)

## **National Eye Health Week 2011**

[www.visionmatters.org.uk](http://www.visionmatters.org.uk)

## **National Osteoporosis Society**

[www.nos.org.uk](http://www.nos.org.uk)

## **Prevention of Falls Network Europe**

[www.propane.eu.org](http://www.propane.eu.org)

## **Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)**

[www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

## **See Ability (information for people with visual impairment and multiple disabilities)**

[www.lookupinfo.org](http://www.lookupinfo.org)

## **Thomas Pocklington Trust**

[www.pocklington-trust.org.uk](http://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk)

## **Visibility**

[www.visibility.org.uk](http://www.visibility.org.uk)

## **Visual Impairment North East**

[www.vine-simspecs.org.uk](http://www.vine-simspecs.org.uk)



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# Frequently asked questions

## What if the theme of ‘vision’ isn’t something my organisation can focus on?

No problem! There are plenty of other topics you can promote, such as:

- footcare
- medication
- continence
- home hazards/external hazards
- medical conditions (e.g. osteoporosis, syncope, arrhythmia)
- physical activity.

Alternatively, you could combine the theme of ‘Watch Your Step’ with another topic.

## Can I get financial support for events?

Unfortunately, Age UK is unable to assist with the costs of events. However, we can support you in other ways and provide promotional materials free of charge.

You could approach a local business or organisation for sponsorship or check your local council website for details of funding for community projects. Some councils may fund local events and most will also give details of grant schemes available locally.



**For more ideas, take a look at the evaluation reports on the Falls Awareness Week website at [www.ageuk.org.uk/fallsday](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/fallsday)**

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## What resources can Age UK provide?

We have a range of promotional resources you can use. These include posters, balloons, stickers, flyers and banners. In addition, this year we have provided the 'wrong glasses' template for you to decorate and wear during your event to really get you noticed.

## How can Age UK help promote my event?

With your permission, we will add the details of your event to our website so that others can see what is going on in the area. This will also give you the opportunity to contact others in the Falls Awareness Week network to exchange ideas and combine forces.

## Can you help me with local media coverage?

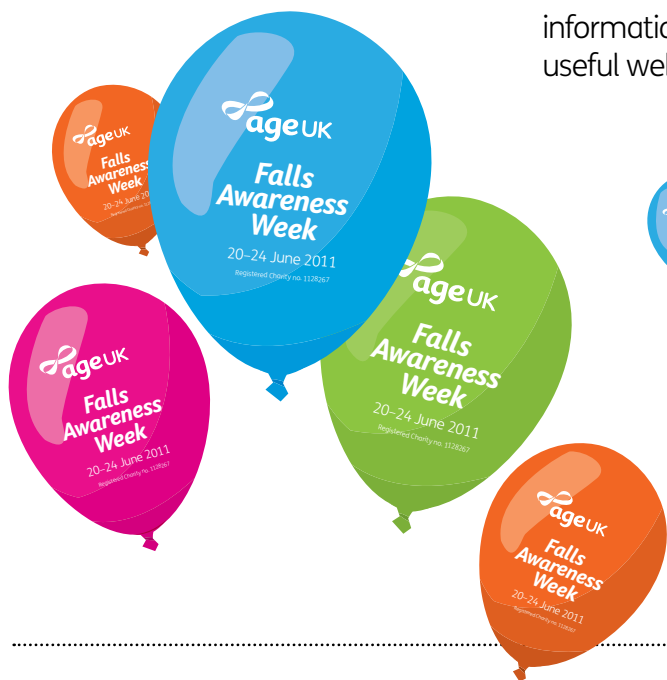
Once you have registered your event, we will supply you with a guide to working with the local press so you can get the most out of your Falls Awareness week activity.

## What about national media coverage?

Age UK will work to get national media coverage of Falls Awareness Week to highlight the issue of falls prevention throughout the UK.

## How else can you support me?

Our monthly newsletters will keep you on track and up to date with all the latest news, including any research or materials that become available. Check the website for further information, including factsheets, useful websites and a map of events.



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# *The ‘wrong glasses’*

Use the template (right) to create some fun with your very own ‘wrong glasses’.

You can make blank cut-outs and provide materials for participants to decorate at your event.

You could encourage attendees to take inspiration from well-known bespectacled celebrities and re-create their look. Make it an intergenerational activity by inviting grandchildren or a local youth group along.

You could also wear your home-made ‘wrong glasses’ for a photo stunt on the day. Contact your local newspaper with the time and details of your event so they can come along and cover your activities.

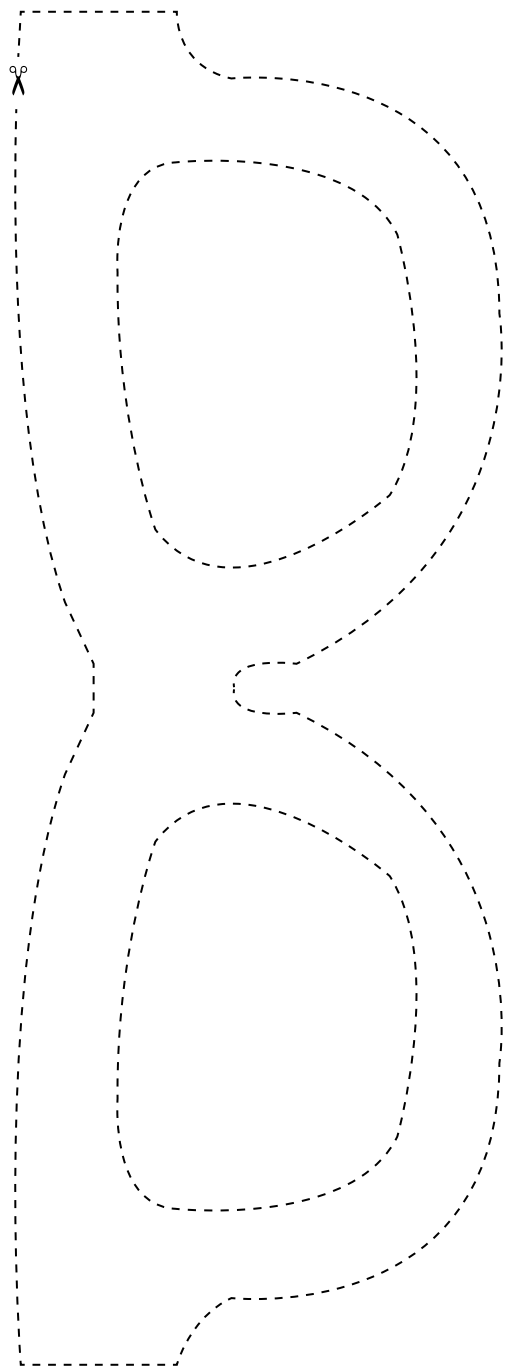
**Remember to keep your own camera and take your own photos to share with us and send into local press after the event, if they are unavailable on the day.**

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**You can make blank cut-outs and provide materials for participants to decorate at your event.**







Photocopy or trace the template onto card, cut out and decorate.  
Use elastic or secure on to a stick to use at your event.

## **Age UK**

Astral House, 1268 London Road, London SW16 4ER

York House, 207–221 Pentonville Road, London N1 9UZ

**020 8765 7200**

**[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)**

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