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Make your home 'falls-free'

Protect your independence
by reducing the chance of falling



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Each year, thousands of older people fall at home. Many of them are seriously injured, and some are disabled. Falls are often due to hazards that are easy to overlook but easy to fix.

This checklist asks about hazards found in of your home. For each hazard, the checklist tells you how to fix the problem.

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Floors

Look at the floor in each room.

When you walk through a room, do you have to walk around furniture?

Ask someone to move the furniture so that your path is clear.

Do you have rugs on the floor, or are your carpets fraying or rucked-up?

Remove the rugs or use double-sided tape or a non-slip backing so that the rugs won't slip.

Are there papers, books, towels, shoes, magazines, boxes, blankets or other objects on the floor?

Pick up things that are on the floor. Always keep objects off the floor.

Do you have to walk over or around wires or cords (e.g. lamp, telephone, or extension cords)?

Coil or tape cords and wires next to the wall so that you can't trip over them. Try to organise things so that your appliances are close to a socket. Do not run cables across the room.

Remove the rugs or use double-sided tape or a non-slip backing so that the rugs won't slip.



Steps and stairs

Look at the stairs you use both inside and outside your home.

Are there papers, shoes, books, or other objects on the stairs?

Pick up things on the stairs. Always keep objects off stairs.

Are some steps broken or uneven?

Ask someone to repair loose or uneven steps.

Do you have poor lighting or have only one light switch at the top or bottom of the stairs?

Use additional lighting, a table lamp or a night light to light the top and bottom of the stairs where possible. Night lights are low-energy lights that plug into a mains socket and emit a low-level light. It is recommended that you use the dusk-to-dawn type that switches on automatically.

Has the stairway light bulb burned out?

Have a friend or family member change the light bulb.

Is the carpet on the steps loose or torn?

Ask someone to make sure that the carpet is firmly attached to every step, or to remove the carpet and attach non-slip rubber treads to the stairs.

Are the stair rails loose or broken?

Is there a stair rail on only one side of the stairs?

Ask someone to refit loose stair rails or put in new ones. Make sure stair rails are on both sides of the stairs and are as long as the stairs.

Pick up things on the stairs.
Always keep objects off stairs.



Kitchen

Look at your kitchen and eating area.

Are the things that you often use located on high shelves?

Rearrange items in your cupboards and cabinets.
Keep things you often use on the lower shelves.

Is your step stool unsteady?

If you must use a step stool, get one with a bar to hold on to. Never use a chair as a step stool.



Rearrange items in your cupboards and cabinets, keep things you often use on the lower shelves.



Bathroom

Look at your bathroom.

Is the bath or shower floor slippery?

Put a non-slip rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor of the bath or shower.

Do you need some support when you get out of the bath/shower or up from the toilet?

Ask someone to fit a grab rail to the wall over the bath, in the shower and/or next to the toilet.



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Bedrooms

Look at all your bedrooms.

Is the light near the bed hard to reach?

Place a lamp close to the bed where it's easy to reach.

Is the path from your bed to the bathroom dark?

Put in a nightlight so that you can see where you are walking. Night lights are low-energy lights that plug into a mains socket and emit a low-level light. It is recommended that you use the dusk-to-dawn type that switches on automatically.

Do you have sheets and bed covers trailing on the floor?

Tuck them out of the way when you first get put of bed: it is easy to trip up when moving around.



Place a lamp close to the bed where it's easy to reach.

Garden

Have a look around.

Are your paths clear of leaves and overgrowing plants?

Keeping your garden tidy and free of obstacles will make it a lot safer.

Are your paving stones free from moss and algae?

Moss and algae become slippery when wet. They thrive in moist, shady areas, so prevent them from growing by pruning overhanging plants and branches to improve the light and air circulation. You can buy products that you apply and rinse off to remove algae, or ask someone to remove it with a pressure washer.

Do you take care if you have to go out in icy weather?

Spread salt or salty sand on your steps if you need to go outside.

If you are using a ladder, is it at a safe angle and anchored at its base?

Never use a ladder when you are on your own; it is far safer to have someone with you who can hold the ladder steady. Alternatively, ask someone to help you by using the ladder themselves.

Do you use a power point fitted with a residual current device (RCD) when using power tools and electric mowers?

An RCD will shut off the power if an electrical fault develops or if you accidentally cut through the cable.

Do you have a high step to get in and out of the property?

Ask someone to fix an additional step and grab rail to the outside of the property.



Keeping your garden tidy and free of obstacles will make it a lot safer.

Other safety tips

- Keep emergency numbers in large print near each phone.
- Put a phone near the floor in case you fall and can't get up, or carry a mobile phone with you at all times. Basic-level mobile phones can be purchased relatively cheaply and can be obtained from many retailers or large supermarkets.
- Think about carrying an alarm device (that can be worn round the neck) that when pressed will notify someone that you have had a fall and can't get up.
- Keep a torch by your bed and, if possible, one on each floor of your property to reduce the risk of falling if a power cut occurs.
- Wear correctly fitted shoes when outside of the house. When inside the house avoid wearing loose-fitting shoes or slippers.

Put a phone near the floor in case you fall and can't get up.



- Ask someone to paint a contrasting colour on the top edge of all steps so you can see the stairs better. For example, use a light-colour paint on dark wood.
- Alternatively, ask someone to add strips of non-slip masking tape, making sure that it stays in good condition and doesn't become a trip hazard in itself.
- Try to clean up any spills straight away. Non-slip matting near the sink, washing machine, fridge or bath/shower may reduce the risk of slipping.
- Make your home safer by contacting our HandyVan service **0845 026 1055** or **handyvan@ageuk.co.uk**. A HandyVan fitter will provide a free assessment and fix identified problems.

There are other factors that affect your risk of falling. Please contact your local Age UK to get a copy of *Your 'falls-free' plan* – a simple guide to help assess your risk of falling and recommend some actions you can take to stay active, independent and falls free.

To find your local Age UK, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.

A HandyVan fitter will provide a free assessment and fix identified problems.



Useful contact details

To contact your local Age UK, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65** or visit **www.ageuk.org.uk**

For products and services for the over-50s, including home insurance and personal alarms, call **0800 169 18 19**.

Age UK runs an emergency alarm service called Age UK Personal Alarms. Call **0800 77 22 66** or visit **www.aidcall.co.uk/personalcare**

Home improvement agencies

Help older homeowners and private tenants to organise repairs, improvements and adaptations to their homes. The environmental health or housing department of your council, or a local Citizens Advice Bureau, should be able to tell you if there is a home improvement agency in your area.

In England contact:

Foundations

0845 864 5210
wwwFOUNDATIONS.uk.com

In Scotland contact:

Care and Repair Forum

0141 221 9879
www.careandrepairsotland.co.uk

In Wales contact:

Care and Repair Cymru

029 2057 6286
www.careandrepair.org.uk

In Northern Ireland contact:

Fold

028 9042 8314
www.foldgroup.co.uk