

Walking safely and balance

'There is always something you can do to improve your ability to move'
'Joints and muscles were designed to move'

Even if you have difficulty with moving, walking or your balance, in the majority of cases the 'right kind' of movement, activity and exercise can improve the way our muscles perform for us - **if we choose to!**

It is possible to improve our movement, the strength in our legs for walking, and get the most out of life, even when our balance is challenged (i.e. from uneven pavements, stairs, carpets and cats!).

For exercise to work it needs to be regular and the right challenge for us individually, and most importantly we need to **stick with it over time**. There is no quick fix, but we can improve what we have.

Here are some steps towards being more mobile and steadier on your feet:

- > Be physically active everyday** (get up, move, stand, walk).
- > Spend less time sitting**, and/or break up your sitting time if you sit for long periods. **This is proven to be very beneficial. Make moving a part of your daily routine e.g always walk around in TV ad breaks, or set yourself a goal of walking upstairs 4 times a day.**

- > **All movement counts.** You may want to try going to an exercise class in your community, but this is not the only way to keep active. Think about what you might enjoy, such as moving around your home more, chair exercise videos, walking more (maybe go one streetlight further each day), gardening, and/or housework.
- > **Tell your GP if you have concerns** about your balance or if you have fallen - they can refer you to physiotherapy if needed, or maybe a specialist exercise programme at a local centre.

Alternatively, you could **go direct to a physiotherapist to provide advice** and a suitable home exercise programme for balance and strength. The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy has information on its website that will help you find a physiotherapist in your locality <https://www.csp.org.uk/public-patient/find-physiotherapist/find-physio>

Eyesight, Hearing and Medication

- > Have regular hearing and eyesight tests as both these things can affect your walking.
- > If you feel unsteady after starting any new medication, discuss this with your GP.

Footwear

- > Using the right footwear at the right time is very important. Any shoes or slippers that you wear should fit you correctly and support your feet and ankles depending on where you are and what you are doing.

- > It is recommended to wear comfortable shoes with cushioned non-slip soles. Try to avoid wearing heels when walking as these can decrease your balance and stability. Footwear protect and support your feet, so you should not walk in stockings or bare feet.

Will a walking aid help me?

Whether you already use a walking aid, or whether you are considering one to give you confidence, it is important to realise that it will not solve the entire problem. Walking aids may help greatly, as well as be recommended, but keeping muscles strong is essential even when using a walking aid. A physiotherapist can provide advice regarding your suitability for walking aids designed specifically for outdoors, if this is felt to be needed.

Falls are not a normal part of ageing and they can be prevented. Conditions such as Parkinson's Disease and impairments following a stroke can cause difficulty walking and moving around, but lots of other medical conditions can influence our balance and strength (e.g. Arthritis, poor vision, back pain). A main reason for feeling unsteady, or having balance issues, is simply the loss of muscle and increased muscle weakness. This has a direct effect on our balance and ability to walk. The good news is that we can do something about it. Regardless of age or stage of decline, and although you may need support (e.g. from physiotherapy), you can do a lot to improve your own balance and strength even in the presence of disease.

Preventing trips and falls

- > Keeping fit will make you stronger and help prevent falling.
- > Regular physical activity helps to keep us independent and can increase our strength, balance and coordination. If you are fitter and stronger you are less likely to have a fall.
- > It is recommended to take 30 minutes of moderate exercise per day. This should be just enough to increase your breathing and heart rate slightly faster than normal, so do not overexert yourself. Your daily exercise can be broken into smaller chunks, perhaps in shorter 10-minute bursts. Try to increase the amount of time you spend exercising slowly each day, and gradually make activities more energetic.
- > Find activities that you find enjoyable. This can be exercise classes, swimming, dancing, walking, gardening, housework, bowling, or exercises at home.
- > Get a walking buddy with a long-term aim to walk more and go on local health walks or try joining local walking groups to keep your motivation to keep active and healthy. Remember to take your mobile phone as a safety precaution, especially if you're out on your own.

- > Try to build exercise into your daily routine and reduce the amount of time sitting and being inactive.

Making your home safe

- > Avoid trailing cables from lamps that could trip you.
- > Make sure loose rugs are not going to present a trip hazard.

Lighting advice

- > Visibility is important. Make sure both the inside and outside of your home are brightly lit.
- > Ask a trusted, professional electrician about your lighting options – such as branched lights to replace single bulbs – to increase light without glare.
- > Consider fitting two-way switches on the landing/hall and/or extra stair lighting.
- > Never walk about in the dark. Always use your bedside light when getting up at night; if the switch is not easily accessible keep a good torch by the bed.

- > Under-cupboard lights can help with meal preparation.

Walking safely outside

- > Take care to have any loose paving or slabs secured and fill in any holes in pathways.
- > Ensure that pathways, drives and steps are well lit at night with outside lighting. You can purchase outdoor lights from many high-street retailers.
- > Keep paths clear from plant pots or stones that may cause a tripping hazard.
- > Take care in wet weather especially if there are leaves on the path you walk along.