

# **Stay on your feet<sup>®</sup>**

your home safety checklist



## Acknowledgments

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**Your aged care assessment team and other health workers can provide you with information about how to prevent a fall. You can discuss falls prevention with the following.**

**Telephone numbers**

<b>Doctor</b>	_____
<b>Aged care assessment team</b>	_____
<b>Occupational therapist</b>	_____
<b>Physiotherapist</b>	_____
<b>Community health nurse</b>	_____
<b>Social worker</b>	_____
<b>Pharmacist</b>	_____
<b>Dietician</b>	_____
<b>Optometrist</b>	_____
<b>Podiatrist</b>	_____
<b>Health promotion staff from your local Area Health Service</b>	_____
<b>Community health centre</b>	_____





# A few simple steps to prevent falls

Falls have enormous social, health and economic costs for both older people and the whole community. One in every three people over the age of 65 years fall each year and around half of these falls occur in and around the home.

A few simple steps can make your home safer. This checklist is a guide to those steps. A safer home can help you maintain an independent lifestyle.

**This checklist is a series of questions that looks at safety in and around your home.**

If you answer **‘no’** to any of the questions, **the checklist suggests things you can do to make your home safer.** Most changes are easy and inexpensive. Many of the items you may need such as paint, handrails, slip-resistant strips, and lighting are available from hardware stores. Home maintenance and modification programs or local service organisations can usually help arrange to install the items.

It's up to you to take steps to prevent a fall.

**Falls can be prevented!**

# Floor checklist

## Answer **yes** or **no**

1. Do your carpets and mats lie flat without wrinkles or curled edges? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
2. Do loose mats have a slip-resistant backing? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
3. Do you clean up spills as soon as they occur? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
4. Are floors free of clutter? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
5. Are all cords and cables safely away from walkways? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
6. Are floor surfaces slip-resistant? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**



# Suggestions

- You are less likely to slip on surfaces such as carpet or unglazed tiles. These surfaces are preferable to polished floors that can be slippery.
- There are also paint-on slip-resistant products.
- Remove all loose mats and rugs or ensure they are firmly secured and have slip-resistant backing.
- Replace worn carpets and floor coverings.
- Always wipe up spills as soon as they occur. Some floor surfaces are particularly slippery when wet.
- Coil or tape cords and cables next to the wall, so you will not trip over them. Have an electrician put in another power point.

## Action needed

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

# Lighting checklist

## Answer **yes** or **no**

1. Are your lights bright enough for you to see clearly? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
2. Are stairs and steps well lit? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
3. Are light switches easy to reach and near each doorway? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
4. Can you easily switch on a light from your bed? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
5. Is there good lighting where you keep medicines? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**



# Suggestions

- 75-watt globes are recommended in all rooms, passageways and stairwells (note that some light fittings take a maximum of 60 watts).
- Plug-in nightlights are an inexpensive way to provide light in dark passageways.
- Consider installing sensor lights in passageways.
- Have extra lights installed or place lamps in dark areas.
- At night it is best to turn on the main room light or the passage light so you can see all objects clearly.
- Allow time for your eyes to adjust when walking from light to dark areas and vice versa.

## Action needed

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

# Stairs, steps and ladders checklist

## Answer **yes** or **no**

1. Are you able to see the edges of the steps clearly? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
2. Are stairs and steps well lit? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
3. Is there a light switch at both the top and bottom of stairways? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
4. Are non-skid treads or paint used on the edges of each step? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
5. Are steps and their coverings in good condition? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
6. Do the steps have a sturdy handrail? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
7. Is your stepladder short and sturdy with slip-resistant feet? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**



# Suggestions

- Stairs may need extra lighting.
- Sensor lights that turn on automatically are recommended.
- Make sure there are handrails on at least one side of all stairways. Handrails on both sides of steps are preferable.
- Keep frequently used items in places that are easy to reach.
- Repair broken steps and replace coverings.
- Make sure carpet is firmly attached to every step or remove the carpet and attach slip-resistant rubber tread on the stairs.
- Have someone with you if it is necessary to use a ladder.
- Ensure your stepladder is in good condition. Ladders with handrails are recommended.

## Action needed

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

# Bathroom and toilet checklist

## Answer **yes** or **no**

1. Do you use slip-resistant mats in the bathroom? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
2. Are the soap, shampoo and towel within easy reach so you don't have to bend or reach too far? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
3. Are you able to get out of the bath or shower without holding onto taps or towel rails? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
4. Do you have handrails in the bath and shower? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
5. Are you able to easily get on and off the toilet seat? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
6. Are you able to walk into your shower without stepping over a raised edge or hob? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**





# Suggestions

- Wet areas are more likely to be slippery and therefore hazardous. Take extra care when walking on a wet surface.
- Use a slip-resistant mat in the shower recess and bath.
- Slip-resistant flooring is recommended for bathrooms.
- Paint-on or self-adhesive slip-resistant strips are advisable in the shower and bath.
- Handrails are recommended in and around the bath, shower and toilet.
- Occupational therapists from your local hospital or Aged Care Assessment Team can advise you on hand rails, modifications and other equipment for your bathroom.

## Action needed

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

# Kitchen checklist

## Answer **yes** or **no**

1. Can you easily reach kitchen items you use regularly without climbing, bending or losing your balance? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
2. Is there good lighting over bench tops and other work areas? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
3. Do you mop up spills straight away? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
4. Is there good ventilation to reduce the risk of eyeglasses fogging? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**



# Suggestions

- Arrange your kitchen so the most frequently used items are easy to reach.
- A kitchen trolley allows you to transport more than one item easily and safely.
- Clean up spills as soon as they occur.
- Range hoods, vents or exhaust fans can be installed to provide better ventilation when cooking.
- If possible install a wall oven in preference to a low oven.
- Use a broad based, sturdy and secure stepladder if it is absolutely necessary to reach high places.

## Action needed

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

# Lounge room checklist

## Answer **yes** or **no**

1. Can you get out of your lounge chair without too much difficulty? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
2. Are all cords, furniture and clutter kept away from walkways? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
3. Is your furniture placed so that you don't have to stretch or lean too far to open windows? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
4. Is your telephone within easy reach? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
5. Do you have a doorbell you can hear easily? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**



# Suggestions

- Higher chairs and chairs with solid armrests are easier to get in and out of.
- Keep telephone and electrical cords clear of walkways.
- Fans and heaters should not be placed in walkways or in the middle of the room.
- Remove loose rugs or apply slip-resistant backing or secure by other means.
- Cordless telephones allow you to keep your telephone handy where ever you are.
- Use wireless door chimes and place the chime box where you can hear it best.

## Action needed

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

# Bedroom checklist

## Answer **yes** or **no**

1. Can you turn on a light before you get out of bed? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
2. Can you get in and out of your bed easily? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
3. Do you have a telephone in the bedroom? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
4. Is your electric blanket cord safely secured so you don't trip? Is the control easy to reach from the bed? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
5. Is your bedspread made without a looped fringe or is your bedspread clear of the floor? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
6. If you use a walking aid, is it within easy reach of the bed? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**



# Suggestions

- Have a light within reach of your bed. Consider a touch lamp or night lamp.
- Keep a torch next to your bed at night.
- Keep bedroom floors free of clutter.
- Keep a telephone beside your bed.
- Secure loose telephone and electrical cords in the bedroom.
- Ensure your eyeglasses are easy to reach if you need them when you get out of bed.
- Beds should be at a good height for easy movement on or off.
- A firm mattress will make getting into and out of bed easier.
- If you are having difficulty getting into or out of your bed, talk with an occupational therapist or community nurse.
- Ensure your bedspread is clear of the floor and is not a trip hazard.
- Get out of bed slowly – sit for a short time before you stand up.
- Have your walking aid handy in case you get up in the night.

## Action needed

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

# Clothing and footwear checklist

## Answer **yes** or **no**

1. Do you wear shoes with slip-resistant soles? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
2. Do your shoes have rounded low, broad heels? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
3. Do you wear street shoes rather than slippers outside the house? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
4. Do your slippers fit firmly and have a slip-resistant sole? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
5. Does your clothing fit securely with no dangling cords or hems? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**

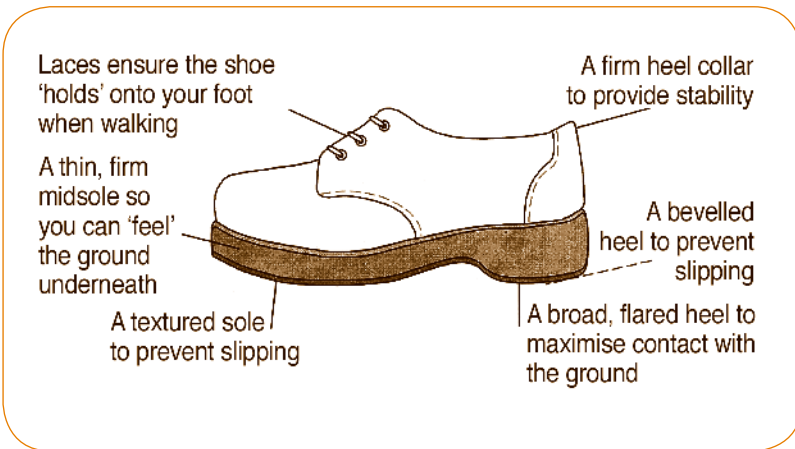


Image courtesy of Prince of Wales Medical Research Institute



# Suggestions

- Shoes and slippers should have slip-resistant soles with patterned tread and rounded, low, broad heels.
- Avoid wearing socks only, loose fitting slippers, leather or other slippery soles and high heels.
- Clothing should be short enough to avoid tripping (particularly nighties and dressing gowns).
- Sit down rather than stand on one leg when dressing.

## Action needed

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

# Walking aids checklist

## Answer **yes** or **no**

1. Can you easily maintain your balance when walking? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
2. Can you use your walking aid easily and comfortably? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
3. Is your walking aid in good condition and well maintained? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
4. Is your furniture placed so that you can use your walking aid easily? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**



# Suggestions

- A walking aid may help you. A health professional, such as a physiotherapist, can prescribe the most appropriate aid for you.
- Make sure your walking aid is the correct height for you.
- Do not use someone else's walking aid.
- When using a walking aid that requires both hands, such as a walking frame, move one hand into the middle of the aid before reaching for objects. This will help you to maintain good balance.
- Maintain your walking aid. Ensure that any loose parts, worn stoppers or bent frames are replaced.
- Remove or reorganise furniture in your home, so a walking aid can be used easily.

## Action needed

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

# Outside your house checklist

## Answer **yes** or **no**

1. Are the edges of steps clearly marked? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
2. Do step edges have an adhesive slip-resistant strip? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
3. Do steps have a sturdy, easy-to-grip handrail? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
4. Are the paths around the house in good repair? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
5. Are the paths and entrances well lit at night? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
6. Is the garden kept free of trip hazards, such as tools and hoses? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
7. Is your garage floor free from grease and oil? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
8. Are the footpaths and public areas around your house in good repair? ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**



# Suggestions

- Make sure all outside steps are easy to see by painting the front edge of the step a contrasting colour or by putting on non-skid treads.
- See suggestions about steps on page 9.
- Paths need to be even and unbroken.
- Keep paths free of moss and leaves, and take extra care when it's wet.
- Walk carefully near pets or small animals, their movement is unpredictable.
- Use a hose reel to store your garden hose.
- Store garden tools safely.
- Contact your local council to advise them of problem areas near your home such as uplifted paths, potholes and low tree branches.
- Many falls result from the use of ladders. If you cannot get someone else to assist you, ensure you comply with all safety instructions.

## Action needed

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_



# Safety tips!

**There are many causes of falls and not all falls happen at home. Steps you can take to prevent a fall include:**

**Regular exercise** – Regular physical activity is important for staying healthy and independent. In addition, exercise that focuses on improving balance (like Tai Chi) can help reduce falls. For help finding activities in your local area, call **NSW Sport and Recreation** on Tel. **13 13 02** or visit [http://www.dsr.nsw.gov.au/active/tips\\_older.asp](http://www.dsr.nsw.gov.au/active/tips_older.asp)

**Regular medical checkups** – if you are aged 75 years and over you are eligible for your local GP to conduct an in-depth assessment of your health under the *Enhanced Primary Care* initiative. Further information: <http://health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-epc-hlthassmnt.htm> or talk to your GP.

**Healthy diet** – maintain your calcium intake by including dairy products, such as milk, cheese and yoghurt. Enjoy high fibre foods, such as breads and cereals (preferably wholegrain), vegetables, fruits, pasta and rice. Further information: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-food-resources.htm> or talk to your GP.

**Regular eye checks** – poor vision can increase your risk of falling. Have your eyes checked regularly – at least once a year.

**Well managed medications** – review your medications with your local GP or pharmacist and ask about side effects of the medication.

**Fact sheets about the causes of falls including tips to reduce your risk of falling can be found on the NSW Department of Health website at [www.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au)**

## **Other safety tips:**

- **Keep emergency telephone numbers near your telephone. Place your telephone in a low position, so it can be reached from the floor.**
- **Think about wearing an alarm device that will bring help in case you fall and cannot get up.**

# For more information!

**For more information on ways to make your home safer or to find out about your nearest Home Maintenance and Modification Service, call your local Aged Care Assessment Team or the Occupational Therapy Department at your local hospital.**

**Other useful contacts include:**

**Aged Care Assessment Teams** – assess older people for care needs and support at home, or residential care in nursing homes and hostels.  
**Tel. 1800 052 222**

**Aged Care Information line** – offers information on hostels, nursing homes and community care packages. **Tel. 1800 500 853**

**Department of Veterans Affairs** – offers assistance with home maintenance and modifications for veterans. **Tel. 133 254**

**Disability Information Services** – offers information and referral services for people with disabilities. **Tel. 1800 177 120**

**Home and Community Care** – provides help with home nursing, household tasks, personal care, respite care, housekeeping, home maintenance and modification and delivered food services.  
**Tel. 1800 052 222**

**Independent Living Centre of NSW** – provides free information and advice on equipment to assist with daily living activities.  
**Tel. 1300 885 886** or **www.ilcnsw.asn.au**

**Seniors Information Service** – offers information about and referral to services, groups and activities for older people in NSW. **Tel. 13 12 44**

**Telstra** – offers services for people with hearing and speech difficulties.  
**Tel. 1800 068 424**

**If you need an interpreter to contact any services, contact the Translating and Interpreting Service. Tel. 131 450**



# What to do if you fall at home

If you do fall, don't panic. **STAY CALM.**

Make a decision whether or not to get up.

## If you decide to try and get up

Take time to recover.

Use stable furniture to help you back to your feet.

Tell someone you have had a fall.

Seek medical advice, if necessary.

## If you decide you can't get up

Try sliding or crawling to seek help.

Try to reach your:

- front door
- telephone
- personal alarm

Make a loud noise to attract attention.

Try and make yourself comfortable while on the floor.

Try and keep warm while on the floor.

Once you have attracted attention, lie quietly until help arrives.

Seek medical advice.



