



Amigos de la Gente de Edad

Precautions against falls in the home

The risks and causes of falls

In the United Kingdom, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) reported that 208,485 falls occurred in the 75+ age group in 2002. One in every five falls result in fractures requiring hospital treatment. Whilst most falls themselves do not result in serious injury, being unable to get up does expose the faller to the risk of hypothermia, pressure sores and loss of confidence. Around half of these falls are from two main causes: tripping over objects; and falls on steps or stairs.

Sadly, but perhaps inevitably, the risk of falling does increase as we get older. An 85 year old is five times more likely to have a fall than a 65 year old.

Some of the medical conditions which may lead to an increased risk of falling are as follows:

- **Poorer balance:** The body's balance reactions slow down with age. Conditions such as Parkinson's Disease and strokes also affect balance.
- **Weaker muscles/unstable joints:** Osteoarthritis is a very common condition which may make it difficult to move around, leading to a lack of exercise resulting in weaker muscles and stiff joints.
- **Poor eyesight:** Eyesight can deteriorate with age, and is more likely to be affected by cataracts and muscular degeneration. This increases the likelihood of tripping and falling, especially if combined with poor lighting.
- **Medication:** Tranquillisers, antidepressants, sleeping pills and some heart tablets can lead to dizziness. Always take prescribed medication, but consult your doctor if new medication makes you feel dizzy.

By following the simple steps in the **14-point action plan**, it is possible to reduce the risks of fall. If you do fall, knowing what to do (see section 'What to do if you have a fall') can make all the difference.

14-point Action Plan

1. Take regular exercise, even if this is only a short walk, to keep muscles strong and joints supple.
2. Fit easy grip handrails on both sides of the stairs. Avoid/minimise climbing stairs if you do not feel safe climbing them.
3. Keep stairs and living areas well lit, use 100-Watt bulbs. Keep a torch by the bed.
4. Never leave objects which may be tripped over, on the stairs or in walking areas.
5. Use non-slip rubber mats in the bath/shower. Fit a handrail near the bath/toilet. Avoid small rugs in the bathroom.
6. Replace worn rugs and carpets. Nail or tape down the edge of rugs to avoid slips or trips.
7. Minimise bending/climbing. Keep frequently used items on racks or in draws at an easy level.
8. If you must climb, use proper steps. Never use chairs or tables, which may be unstable.
9. Get up from chairs/bed slowly. Blood pressure falls as you get up, and your body may take longer to adjust, as you get older.
10. Avoid poor fitting shoes or slippers, and avoid high heels.
11. Have regular eye tests.
12. Avoid clothes which may trip you, such as trailing nightdresses.
13. Don't rush to answer the telephone. Warn friends that it may take you longer to reach the telephone. Have an extension socket fitted upstairs.
14. If prescribed medication is making you feel dizzy, keep taking it, but consult your doctor at once.

What to do if you have a fall

- **Don't panic:** You will probably feel a little shocked and shaken, but try to stay calm.
- **Assess the situation:** If you are hurt or feel unable to get up, follow the **Rest and wait plan**. If you are unhurt, and know you are able to get up, follow the **Up and about plan**.
- **See your doctor:** All falls are potentially serious and you should see your doctor afterwards.

The rest and wait plan

- If you are hurt or unable to get up, wait for help.
- Try to summon help: Use a pendant alarm (Tele-Alarm) if you have one, bang on the wall, call out for help, crawl towards your telephone (always keep it at a low level.)

- Move to a soft surface: If you have fallen on a hard floor try to move to a carpeted area.
- Keep warm: Try to reach for something to cover you. Try to move out of drafts.
- Keep moving: Do not lie in one position, as you may get cold and suffer from pressure sores. Roll from side to side and move arms and legs if possible.
- If you need to empty your bladder while you are on the floor, use a newspaper or item of clothing to soak up the liquid and try to move from the area.

The up and about plan

Before you attempt to get up, make sure that you are not hurt. The method below is one safe way to get up from a fall but there are others. NOTE: We strongly recommend as a rule that you ask for the assessment from a physiotherapist who can advise you on the most appropriate way to get up.

1. Roll onto hands and knees and crawl to a stable piece of furniture such as a bed, stool or chair.
2. With hands on the support, place one foot flat on the floor bending your knee in front of your stomach.
3. Lean forward, push on your feet and hands until you bring the other foot to be beside the first.
4. Turn and sit on the seat.
5. Rest for a while before getting up.

Where to get further help & advice

RoSPA Head Office:

RoSPA House, Edgbaston Park, 353 Bristol Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B5 7ST, UK

General Information: 0044 121 248 2000

Fax Number: 0044 121 248 2001

Email: help@rospa.com **Website:** www.rospa.co.uk

Your doctor: Always consult your doctor following a fall. She or he can determine the cause of the fall and, if necessary, refer you on to appropriate help.

Physiotherapists: Some Physiotherapists specialise in the needs of older people and can assess your ability to get up from a fall without help, advise on the safest method of getting up from a fall and, where appropriate, teach specific exercises.

Age Concern España: Has details of equipment to make your home safer which can be purchased in Spain or in the U.K. Further INFORMATION may be obtained by telephoning 971 23 15 20. In some instances mobility aids may be borrowed or loaned from your local Age Concern Organisation.

Phone emergency assistance: Age Concern España acts as intermediary between the expatriate community and a number of companies/organisations, e.g., Telesistencia S.L., Mapfre, etc. In some cases funding can be obtained from British Charities. Further information may be obtained from Infosheet 16 or by telephoning 971 23 15 20, 971 71 87 94, 902 00 38 38.

Source: Age Concern England, The Royal Society for Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) and Stephanie Kitchener, MCSP (A Senior Community Physiotherapist who regularly advises older people who are at risk of falling.)

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For further information ring INFOLINE on (+34) 971 71 87 94 or send an email to info@ageconcern-espana.org