

# Tips and Advice for Preventing Falls

Engelska



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Did you know that falling is the leading cause of death, hospital admissions and visits to the emergency department each year?

Falling is common amongst the elderly, but you can limit and prevent your risk of falling by eating well, exercising and a good understanding of your medication.

This leaflet will give you tips and advice about food, exercise and medication. It also includes some simple exercises that can strengthen your muscles and improve balance.

# Eight Simple Habits to Avoid Falling

You can do a lot to prevent yourself from falling and the consequences such an accident might have. Here are eight tips that can help you stay on your feet.

- 1. Regular exercise.** Choose activities that challenge your balance and strengthen your bones. Try to find activities that you enjoy – ideally group activities. Tai Chi, yoga, Qigong, walking, Nordic walking or dancing are some examples. Taking the stairs is also a good idea. Start based on your current ability and gradually increase the tempo and effort. Some exercises can be done whilst sitting down.
- 2. Watch what you eat.** Make sure you have a balanced diet. Ideally, eat something rich in protein with every meal, such as meat, fish, beans, eggs or dairy products. Milk, cultured buttermilk and yoghurt contain calcium and vitamin D.
- 3. Drink regularly** Remember to drink at meals as well as in and in between. On warm days, you might need to drink more. Some medications can also affect your sense of thirst.

- 4. Check your medication.** Ask your doctor about any side effects from your medication. Some medication can make you tired and affect your balance. Tell your doctor if you notice these side effects. The doctor might adjust your dose or swap the medication for something else without these side effects.
- 5. Contact your healthcare centre if you are worried.** Maybe you've already had a fall, or are afraid of falling. Falls can be caused by several things, but there are also many ways healthcare services can help you feel safer. For example, you can have the strength of your bones measured at your healthcare centre and see if anything needs to be done to improve it.
- 6. Have regular vision and hearing checks.** Problems with sight and hearing can affect both your balance and your coordination. Pay attention if you find you have difficulty hearing or have earache.
- 7. Take care of your feet.** Foot problems – especially those that cause pain – can affect your balance. If you are having problems with your feet, tell your doctor or visit a footcare specialist.
- 8. Secure your home.** Make your home safer by making sure there is no risk of you tripping on cables or mats. Consider whether the layout of your furniture is right for your needs and make sure you have good lighting.



# Find a Balance in the Fridge

A combination of regular eating habits and exercise is just one way you can keep your muscle strength and balance.

## Good Food Makes You Stronger

Food gives your body energy and nutrition whilst strengthening your bones and muscles. The contents of your fridge and pantry are incredibly important for counteracting natural age-related changes and changes caused by illnesses and medication. So it is important that you eat well throughout your life and that you are physically active so the ageing process is as smooth as possible.

As early as in your 30s, you naturally start to lose muscle mass unless you actively prevent this. After you turn 50, things deteriorate even faster. The levels of nutrition you consume have a great influence on your risk of falling. Therefore it is important that you eat the right amount of nutritious food. This will help to keep your body healthy and maintain your strength.

Pay attention if you lose weight involuntarily. Perhaps this is because you can no longer taste flavours? This could be because of your medication. Medication can cause a dry mouth, nausea, dizziness and stomach ache. Seek help if you experience these problems, because if you lose weight, you also lose muscle mass. This in turn leads to worse balance and increases the risk of falling.

## You Need to Eat More Protein and Fat as You Get Older

Older people need food that contains more protein, vitamin D and fat than younger people. If you eat two cooked meals a day, you increase your chances of getting what you need. At lunch and dinner time, it is a good idea to follow the Swedish Plate Model – that is, a portion of protein (meat, fish and eggs), a portion of carbohydrates (rice, pasta, potatoes and bread) and a portion of vegetables.



It is vital that your food contains enough energy (kilocalories), especially if you eat smaller portions.

Each day you need:

- Different types of fat – from canola or olive oil, margarine, fatty fish, dairy products or nuts.
- Varied carbohydrates – bread, cereals, potatoes and pasta. Opt for wholewheat products such as oats and crispbread.
- Protein with each meal – such as eggs, cheese, fish, chicken, meat or dairy products. Peas, beans, chickpeas and lentils are also rich in protein.
- Vitamins and nutrients that can be found in vegetables, root vegetables, fruits and berries.

## Reduced Appetite is Common

As you age, it is common for your appetite to decrease. There are several reasons for this – taking medication, you no longer enjoy eating things that used to taste good or simply because you miss having company eating. As a result, you might lose interest in both making food and eating it.

It is a good idea to eat at least three times per day and include a couple of snacks. If you start to lose weight, you need to eat more fatty products to stop the weight loss. Add some butter to potatoes and porridge, mayonnaise with your fish, oil on salads and sour cream with your yoghurt.

## Some Food Tips

- Take time to eat your meal and don't go for long periods without eating. Have a few snacks during the day.
- Try to consume all the important food groups each day: protein, fat, carbohydrates, fruit and vegetables. Use the Plate Model to help you choose good, healthy food.
- Serve vegetables and root vegetables warm, with a dab of butter or splash of oil. The fat helps the body absorb the fat-soluble nutrients and provides extra energy.
- Colourful food can also increase your appetite – you also eat with your eyes. Colourful fruits and vegetables are also full of nutrients.
- If your appetite is poor, try to consume slightly more fat and protein. Your body needs it.



# Find the Balance with Exercise and Physical Activities

Research shows that physical activities and balance exercises prevent injury caused by a fall.

If you've been exercising your whole life – keep going!  
If you're about to start – great! The best thing is that it is never too late to start exercising to build up fitness, strengthen your bones and muscles and improve your balance.

## Exercise Makes you Stronger

Weight training increases muscle strength – even among the oldest people. The risk of falling decreases. Furthermore, you reduce the risk of seriously hurting yourself if you do end up falling. Balance training is another important way to reduce the risk of falling.

Physical activities reduce the risk of a range of age-related illnesses. Exercise improves your sleep, which will also have a positive impact on your general wellbeing.

## Choose Exercise You Enjoy, Based on Your Ability

Choose exercises that are right for your physical health, strength and balance. You should exercise regularly, so it is important that you try out activities until you find what's right for you. Many people think it is more fun to exercise in groups.

A good idea is to perform exercises that strengthen your muscles and train your balance. There are a number of daily activities that exercise your body, for example housework, gardening or when you go out for a walk.

Start by doing what you can and then gradually and carefully raise the intensity. Increase the duration and frequency of your activities before you increase the tempo. This way, you will reduce the risk of injury.

The exercise should be weight bearing – for each step you take, you move your own body weight. Weight bearing exercise includes Tai Chi, dancing and walking up and down the stairs.

A 30 minute walk each day is good exercise. It is also a good idea to combine the walks with other activities, such as weight training. Weight training twice a week is a good complement to your everyday exercise.

## Start with Something that Appeals to You

If your muscles are not used to exercising, even the shortest walk or the most simple exercises are better than nothing. Base your exercise on your situation and possibilities – and what appeals to you.

## Avoid Sitting Still for Long Periods

If you do sit still for long periods, it is a good idea to get into the habit of standing up regularly. This way, you use your leg muscles and get your body going. If you cannot stand, there are exercises you can do sitting down.

## Wear the Right Shoes

Wear the right shoes for the activity. Shoes with heel supports and soles with a good grip help keep you steady. Use ice cleats if it is slippery outside. Shoes with in-built cleats are also available. If you enjoy walking with hiking poles, remember it might be a good idea to fit them with ice grips in the winter. Contact your healthcare centre if you need walking aids.

## Simple Exercises for You

Many training facilities and pensioner organisations offer exercise programmes aimed at older people, as well as other activities. Nevertheless, you can still exercise on your own. On the following page, you will find some exercises you can do by yourself to strengthen your leg muscles and improve your balance.

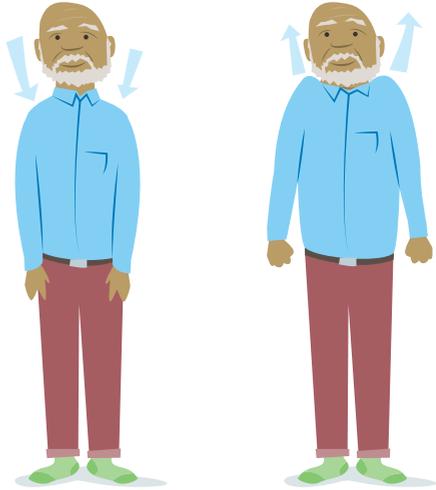
You will also be given suggestions about the number of times you can do each exercise. Do as many as you can and gradually increase the number when you are used to the programme.

## Shoulder Lift

Sitting or standing:  
Raise your shoulders to your ears, hold, pause, then return to the starting position.

Do this 12 times.

Clench your fists when you raise your shoulders and spread your fingers as you lower them.



## Curl Up and Stretch

When seated: Place your hands on your knees and curl forward. Slowly straighten your back and place your hands behind you on the seat, with your fingers facing forwards. Arch your back as much as you can.

Do this 4 times.

When standing: Bend your knees, bend over and place your hands on your thighs or knees.

Slowly stretch up and place your hands on the small of your back, arching your back as much as possible.

Do this 4 times.



## Shoulder Movement

Sitting or standing:  
Hold a towel with both hands.

Extend your arms towards the ceiling, stretch your back and reach as far back as possible and stretch 3-4 times.

Lower your arms.

Do this 4 times.



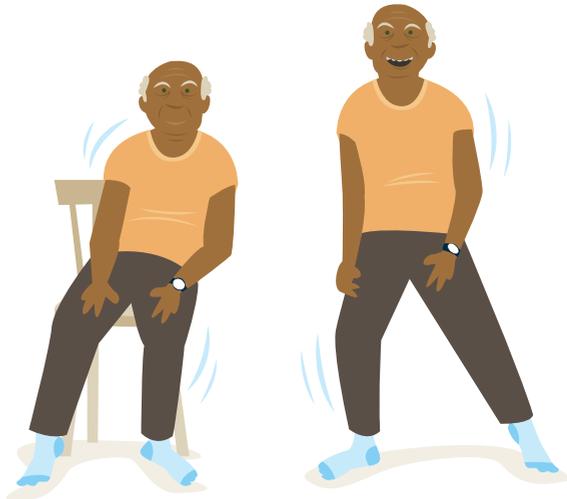
## Shift Your Weight

When seated: Lean to the side as far as you can, slightly raising one side of your bottom from the chair.

Repeat 6 times in each direction.

When standing: Stand with your legs apart. Transfer the weight from your right leg to your left, and once again from left to right.

Repeat 6 times in each direction.



## Toe Raise

When seated: Sit on the edge of a chair with your feet flat on the floor.

Keep your toes on the floor and raise your feet 8 times, then gently shake your legs.

When standing: Stand on your tiptoes 8 times. If necessary, steady yourself against a chair or wall.



## Standing From Sitting

Sit on a stable chair. Place one foot in front of the other, just like when walking.

Try to stand up. If you need support to stand up, place the chair against a stable table that you can hold onto.

Do this 8 times.



## High Knee Lifts

Sitting or standing:  
Lift one knee whilst using  
your hand to place re-  
sistance on the opposite  
knee. Relax your leg and  
do the same with the other  
side.

Do this 4 times per leg.



Inspiration for the text and illustrations are fetched from the brochure  
"Styrk kroppen og let hverdagen – det er aldrig for sent!"



# Find the Balance in Your Medicine Cabinet

Some medications increase your risk of falling. For example they may make you tired or dizzy. So it is important that you know how your medicines work – both on their own and in combination with any other medicines you may be taking. Ask your doctor or pharmacist. This is a particularly important question if you are being treated by several different doctors.

## Medicine Metabolises Differently Depending on Your Age

As you get older, the body changes the way it metabolises medicines. Sometimes, the medication might stay in the body of an older person longer than it would in a younger person. This could cause the effects of the medication to last longer, or the levels of medication to become too high. Consequently, this could increase the risk of falling.

## Certain Medications Increase the Risk of Falling

Sedatives increase the risk of falling, as does medication used to treat depression and sleeping pills. Strong painkillers such as morphine (including morphine patches) increase the risk of

falling, as well as a number of medications to treat cardiac and circulatory problems. If you are taking a combination of painkillers, antidepressants, sedatives or sleeping pills, this will increase your risk of falling.

Alcohol can increase the effects of many medicines, especially those that affect the nervous system. For example if you combine sleeping pills and strong morphine preparations with alcohol, this will increase your risk of falling.

## Ask the Doctor About Your Medication

Many studies show that medication can be the cause of older people falling and injuring themselves. So ask the doctor the following questions about your medication:

- Why do I need this medicine?
- Is there any other treatment that doesn't involve taking medication? If not, what should I be aware of?
- I already take several medicines – is it possible to have a medication review?
- Will the medication increase my risk of falling, by making me dizzy for example.
- Can this medication increase my risk of falling if I take it with other medicines?

Don't worry about feeling like an "inconvenience". This is about your body and your health and you are quite within your rights to ask questions about anything you may be uncertain of.

## Take Note of the Effects of Your Medication

Try to take note of the effects your medication has on you. Note when you start taking new medicines. Also write down if you experience any side effects, for example if you feel dizzy or something else bothers you. These notes can help you see if there is a connection between the medication and your experiences.

It is also important that you tell your doctor about your experiences. Your doctor might need to change the dose or change to another medication.



# Eight Tips that Can Reduce the Risk of Falling

You can do simple things to make your home safer to reduce the risk of falling. Here are eight useful tips.

- 1. Check your mats.** Mats can easily slide about if you trip or slip. It is a good idea to place an anti-slip material under your mats. Remember that it is easy to trip over the edges of mats.
- 2. Check your cables.** There is a chance you might trip over any loose cables on your floor. See if you can run your cables along the walls.
- 3. Make sure you have good lighting.** Good lighting is important both inside the home and in stairwells. It might also be a good idea to have a night light.
- 4. Carry a mobile phone.** If you always have a mobile phone on your person, you can get help quickly if you have an accident.
- 5. Get rid of high thresholds.** It's easy to trip over high thresholds. See if they can be removed.



**6. Easy access.** You probably have some things that you use more often than others, so it is a good idea to keep them close at hand. They might be things you use to keep you occupied, things you use in the kitchen or need to use often for other reasons.

**7. Have somewhere to sit down.** It might make things easier if you have somewhere to sit down, for example in the hall where you take your shoes off or somewhere else where you might need to rest.

**8. Secure the bathroom.** Wet floors are slippery floors. A non-slip mat in the bathtub or shower might be helpful, as well as a non-slip bath mat for you to stand on after you have had a bath or shower. A bath and shower bench or chair can make things easier.

Changing your curtains, ceiling lamps and batteries in your fire alarm can be difficult. If you change these yourself, it makes sense to use stepladders instead of a chair or a stool. You can also ask for help – many municipalities have services that can help you with these things.

Tips and Advice for Preventing Falls  
Everyone can fall, but with the right food, exercise and understanding of your medication you can reduce your risk of falling.

**Tips and Advice for Preventing Falls**

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