



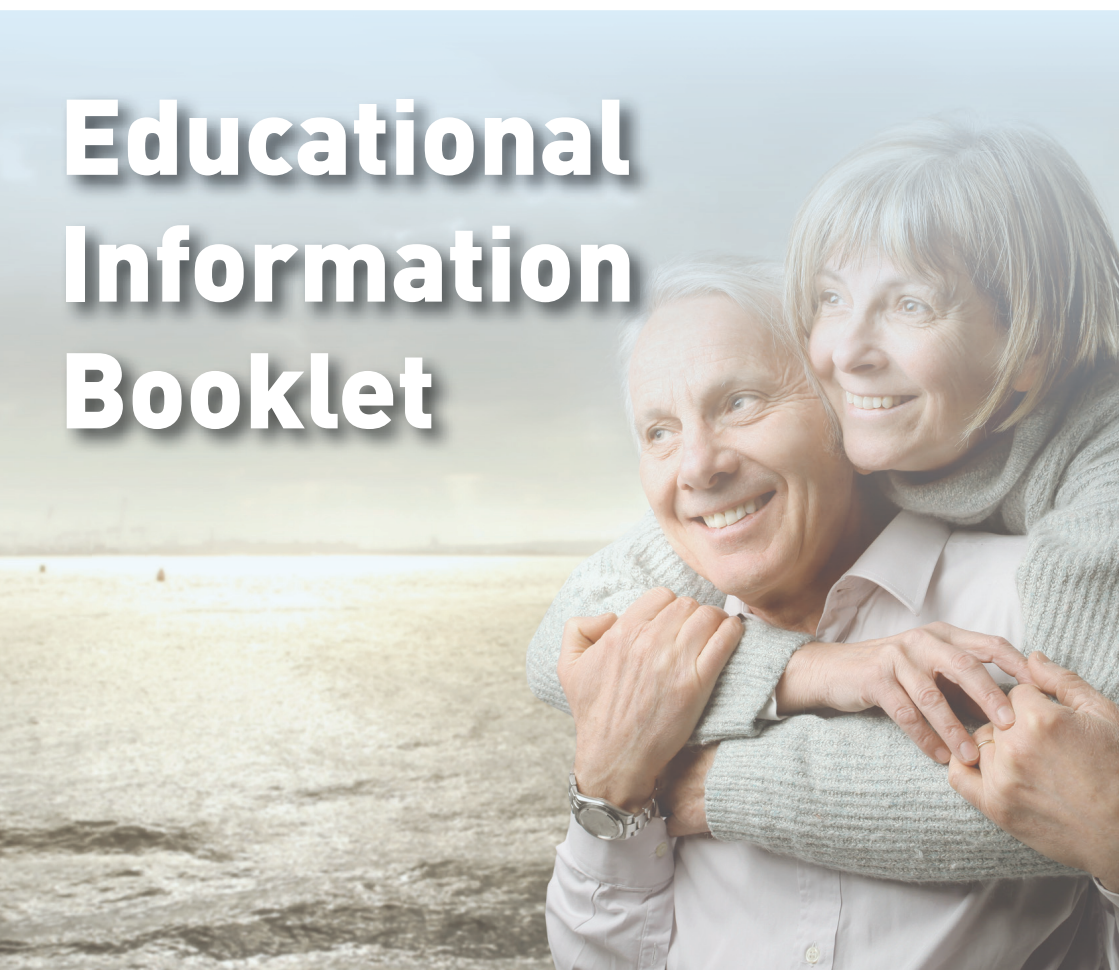
Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive



Active & Healthy Ageing

Falls Prevention Educational Information

Educational Information Booklet



Don't fall for it!

As we get older, we all have increased risk of falling. The good news is that there are many simple things we can do to reduce the risk and stay independent.

Where it is not possible to reduce the risk, there are measures we can use to help us cope if we fall. Some of these seem obvious, but we don't always remember them. Answer the following questions to find out what you can do.



Have you had a fall?

It is important to find out **WHY** you have fallen. Making small changes, where possible, should help to reduce your risk of future falls.

We suggest:

- ▶ Speak to your doctor or any other health professional, such as a public health nurse or physiotherapist and ask for a falls assessment. This will usually include simple tests of your balance and walking and questions about your medication, health and home environment to help find out why you are falling.
- ▶ Consider wearing a pendant alarm to ensure help is on its way if you fall and need assistance. A pendant is worn around your neck or wrist and is linked to a list of telephone numbers of your choice (see contact details at the back of this booklet for more information).



Do you feel light-headed or dizzy when you stand up after lying or sitting down?

When you stand up your blood pressure can drop and this can cause some people to feel dizzy and put you at risk of falling.

We suggest:

- ▶ If you have been lying down for a long time, sit on the side of the bed for a couple of minutes before standing up.
- ▶ If you have been sitting for a long time, get up slowly and make sure you are steady before walking.
- ▶ Tell your doctor if you think your medication is making you feel dizzy.
- ▶ Ask your doctor or nurses to check your blood pressure.
- ▶ Ensure that you eat and drink regularly.

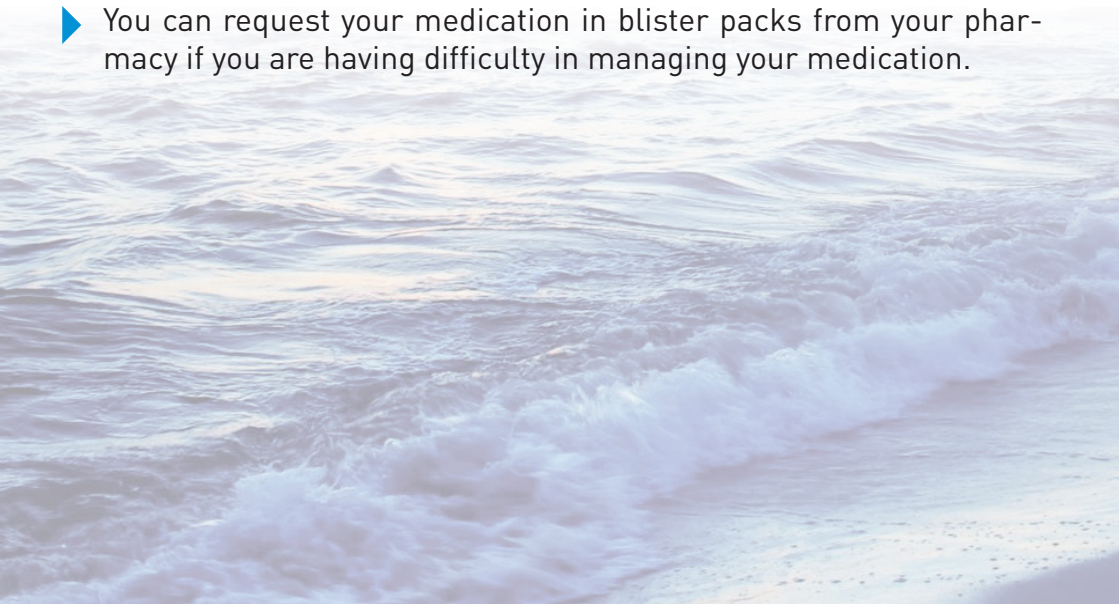


Do you take multiple medications?

Being on 4 or more medications has been shown to increase your risk of falling. However, these may be necessary and therefore the following suggestions will help keep you safe.

We suggest:

- ▶ You do not take any medication without your Doctors/Pharmacist advice.
- ▶ Ask your doctor or practice nurse to check your blood pressure.
- ▶ Always take medicines and tablets as prescribed.
If new medicines or tablets cause side effects, always let your doctor know.
- ▶ Ask your doctor to review your medication regularly to stop any that you no longer need. If you are over 65 years your doctor should review your medication every 12 months.
- ▶ You can request your medication in blister packs from your pharmacy if you are having difficulty in managing your medication.



Do you feel unsteady when walking?

As we get older it is important to keep mobile. Gentle exercise, at any age can help to improve your balance and strengthen your muscles and so decrease your risk of falling.

We suggest:

- ▶ Be active every day: walking is a good form of exercise.
- ▶ Ask your doctor to refer you to your community physiotherapist if you feel unsteady or have had a fall.
- ▶ If you have had more than one fall in the last twelve months ask your doctor to refer you to a specialist falls clinic or age related care clinic.
- ▶ If you are given a walking aid eg. A walking stick or frame, ensure you know how to use it correctly and use it at all times.



Do you have difficulty getting to the toilet on time?

As we get older and/or due to certain medications, our bladder or bowel control can change. Rushing to the toilet can become a problem that increases our risk of falls.

We suggest:

- ▶ Try to take your time when getting to the toilet – if you find you need the toilet more frequently, try to get into a habit of going regularly e.g. every two hours whether you feel you need to or not.
- ▶ Speak to your doctor about medications that have changed your bladder or bowel habits.
- ▶ Always leave a light on in the hallway or a night light when getting up to the toilet during the night.
- ▶ Consider getting a urinal bottle (for men) or a commode at your bedside if you need to use the toilet often overnight – your Public Health Nurse or Doctor can give you information about this.



Have you ever broken a bone?

Breaking a bone following a fall could mean that you have osteoporosis. This means that your bones are not as strong as they should be.

We suggest:

- ▶ Drinking milk, taking yoghurt and cheese help provide Calcium to keep your bones strong but you also need Vitamin D3 too.
- ▶ Daily requirements are: Calcium (1000mg) and Vitamin D3 (800 IU) daily, consider changing to fortified milk, yoghurts and cereals.
- ▶ Try to get out into the good weather whenever you can, sunshine is a great source of Vitamin D. Oily fish is also a good source of dietary Vitamin D.
- ▶ Exercise regularly.
- ▶ If you have ever had a fracture following a fall, you need to speak to you GP about getting a bone health assessment.



Your health and well-being

Weight:

- ▶ It is important to eat regular meals and maintain a healthy weight.
- ▶ Being underweight can increase your risk of osteoporosis and bone fractures.
- ▶ Being overweight can put excessive strain and pressure on your joints. If you are concerned, discuss this with your GP regarding dietician referral.

Alcohol Advice:

- ▶ If you take alcohol do not exceed the recommended limits:

Men – 21 Units per week

Women – 14 Units per week

1 unit = 1 small glass of wine/measure of spirit.

2 units = 1 pint of beer/stout/cider.

- ▶ Being overweight can put excessive strain and pressure on your joints. If you are concerned, discuss this with your GP regarding dietician referral.

Smoking Advice:

- ▶ Smoking decreases bone strength and can lead to osteoporosis and possible fractures.
- ▶ If you want to stop smoking the Quit-line phone number is 1850 201 203. Monday – Friday 9am-5pm.

Do you have difficulty with your eyesight/hearing?

Being able to see and listen out for obstacles in your environment is important in reducing your risk of falling.

Weight:

- ▶ Get your eyesight/hearing tested every year.
- ▶ Have good lighting in all areas of your home.
- ▶ Keep rooms clear of obstacles.
- ▶ Pause to give your eyes times to adapt to changes in light intensity.
- ▶ Always turn on a light when you go to the toilet at night or keep a night light switched on in your room.
- ▶ Make sure your glasses are in good condition and are cleaned regularly.
- ▶ If you use a hearing aid, keep spare batteries nearby and always wear the aid.
- ▶ Being able to see and listen out for obstacles in your environment is important in reducing your risk of falling.

Do you have problems with your feet?

Foot problems like calluses, bunions, corns, untrimmed toenails or ingrown toenails change the way you walk and can affect your balance.

We suggest:

- ▶ Wear comfortable, well-fitting, flat shoes and with a back on them.
- ▶ Tie laces securely and make sure they do not trail. If you have difficulty tying laces consider shoes with Velcro straps or elastic shoe-laces which are available from your pharmacy.
- ▶ Buy slippers that have proper backs on them, rather than slip-ons and replace slippers when worn out.



Is your home environment safe?

There are hazards both inside and outside the home that may cause falls:

1. Uneven flooring
2. Spillages
3. Poor lighting
4. Trailing wires
5. Loose or worn rugs and carpets
6. Furniture or objects in walkways
7. Steps and stairs with no hand rails
8. Pets
9. Uneven and loose paving
10. Slippery leaves or icy pavements

Safety Tips

Indoors:

- ▶ Remove mats, rugs or cords that you could trip over.
- ▶ Place cords behind furniture or tape them to the wall or floor.
- ▶ Wipe up spills IMMEDIATELY.
- ▶ Do not rush when answering the phone.
- ▶ The home should be kept clutter free.

Lighting:

- ▶ **Always** have the light switched on when using the stairs.
- ▶ Leave the landing light switched on overnight to prevent any falls.
- ▶ Sensor lights at the front and ideally the back of the home are helpful in reducing potential falls.
- ▶ Ask someone else to replace a high bulb.
- ▶ Keep a torch at your bedside.

Support

Grab bars can help you get into and out of your bath or shower and can help prevent falls. Many people fit grab rails:

- At the toilet
 - At the shower/bath
 - At the front/back door of the home where there are steps
 - In hallways/landing area of the home to provide added support when walking
- ▶ An additional stair-rail would add to a person's safety when using the stairs.
 - ▶ Many pieces of furniture are not designed to take human weight and as a result should not be used as support when walking.

Outdoors:

- ▶ Walk on level surfaces where possible.
- ▶ Avoid slippery surfaces e.g. mossy steps, icy paths.
- ▶ Use your walking aid at all times.
- ▶ Information can be obtained from Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and nursing team.

What else can you do?

Footwear

Ensure that footwear is comfortable with good grip on the sole and back support.

Velcro straps offer good comfort, especially if you have difficulty with swollen feet or find it difficult managing lace up footwear.

If your feet are swollen, speak to your Physiotherapist who will advise on appropriate footwear.

Hip Protectors

These protective pants are cushioned around the hips to absorb the force of a fall and minimise hip fractures. They come in different sizes and are machine washable. Your physiotherapist will measure and advise you in the correct usage of this.

Mobility Aids

Physiotherapists may recommend the use of a walking stick, Zimmer frame or a rollator frame following assessment of balance.

Your physiotherapist will provide you with training on the usage to make sure that you are safe using it. These aids are to provide needed support for people with reduced balance.

It is important to maintain this equipment by checking the ferrules (the rubber end on the bottom of your walking frame, stick etc.), wheels and brakes for wear and tear. Any damage should be reported to your Physiotherapist.

Clothing

Be aware clothes that are too long e.g. dressing gown, trousers, or skirts can pose a trip hazard.

Do you worry about falling?

It is common for people to worry about falling especially if you have already had a fall.

We suggest:

- ▶ Talk to your Doctor/health care professional about this fear.
- ▶ Consider how you could prepare to get help if you have a fall eg. Wear a pendant alarm.
- ▶ Have regular contact with family and friends so that they know you are safe and well.
- ▶ Ask family or GP to help you organise a pendant alarm which will give you the reassurance that help will come if you need it.



What should you do if you have a fall?

We suggest:

- ▶ It is important to get help as promptly as possible after you have a fall and to always let somebody know that you have fallen.
- ▶ Call for help if there is somebody in the house with you, if not use the pendant alarm.
- ▶ If you don't think you have injured yourself try to gently get up off the floor, see diagram on the next page.
- ▶ Reach for a firm surface to support you.
- ▶ If you cannot get up, try to reach for a blanket or extra clothing such as a coat nearby to put over yourself and keep warm until help arrives.
- ▶ If you do feel very sore, do not try to move just wait for help to arrive. Always inform your Doctor that you have had a fall.



Top tips to prevent falls

We suggest:

- ▶ Keep active and do some exercise every day.
- ▶ Eat well to remain healthy and keep bones strong.
 - Three meals a day with healthy snacks in between.
 - Have at least 3 servings from the milk group of foods every day, one serving being a glass of milk, yoghurt or a matchbox size piece of hard cheese.
 - Choose cereals, milk and yoghurt with added vitamin D. Have eggs and oily fish such as sardines, mackerel and salmon regularly.
 - Drink at least 6 to 8 cups of fluid every day, more during hot weather or exercise. Water, milk, tea, coffee and fruit juice all count but alcoholic drinks do not.
- ▶ Have your eyesight/hearing checked regularly.
- ▶ Have your medicines and tablets checked every 12 months.
- ▶ Take care of your feet. Wear well-fitting shoes and slippers.
- ▶ Seek advice about incontinence.
- ▶ Ensure your home is safe by removing tripping hazards.
- ▶ Maintain your social contacts and take time for friends.
- ▶ Worried about falling? Find somebody to talk to.
- ▶ Ask why your falls are happening.

Useful Links

For general information visit the Age Action website www.ageaction.ie

For information on alzheimers from the Alzheimers Society of Ireland call 1800 341 341 or visit www.alzheimer.ie

For informative videos on falls, exercise and bone health visit: www.bonehealth.co

For information for carers call the Carers Association on 1800 240 724 or visit www.carersireland.ie

To find your local health service/list of health centres: www.hse.ie

For information about osteoporosis: Lo-call 1890 252 751 or visit www.irishosteoporosis.ie

For information about Pendant alarms check Pobal, under the Seniors Alert Scheme on www.pobal.ie

For minor repair jobs that you may need help with around the home contact Sligo Lend a Hand on 087 177 6386 or email sligolendahand@hotmail.com



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