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## Preventing falls in hospital

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### Summary

- All people are vulnerable to falls regardless of age, but as you get older there is often a higher risk of falling.
  - Falls can contribute to an older person's decline and loss of independence.
  - Always follow hospital staff advice about what you can do safely on your own.
  - Ask for help if you need it or feel unsafe or unsteady on your feet.
  - To prevent falls, don't rush – take your time to slowly get up from lying to sitting, and then sitting to standing.
  - Get your balance before moving away from the bed or chair.
  - Be aware of the things around you, and watch for spills or objects in the way.
  - If you do fall, keep calm and call for help.
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Hospitals are unfamiliar places and this can be a challenge when you are also unwell or injured. You may feel dizzy, or weak and less steady than you expect when you get up from bed. When you feel like this, you may be at risk of falling.

Falls in any situation can cause injury and many people end up in hospital due to a fall. If you have a fall while in hospital, it may lengthen your hospital stay.

All people are vulnerable to falls regardless of age, though as you get older, there is often a higher risk of falling.

### Fall risks for older people in hospital

Falls can contribute to an older person's decline and loss of independence. For many older people, there may also be psychological impacts such as fear of falling, which may lead to an older person limiting their activity.

It is important to maintain your ability to move around and to look after yourself. It can speed up your recovery and reduce your stay in hospital.

Items to bring to hospital that can help maintain your mobility include:

- a walking aid, glasses and hearing aids if you use them
- comfortable clothing that is not too long, too loose or too tight
- comfortable, well-fitting, flat, non-slip shoes or slippers.

When you arrive in hospital:

- Become familiar with the surroundings.
- Get to know your bed controls, and how to use the nursing call bell.
- Keep the nursing call bell, your glasses, footwear and walking aid in easy reach, and use them.

### Talk to staff about preventing falls in hospital

Always follow hospital staff advice about what you can do safely on your own. It is recommended that you:

- Talk to hospital staff about what you can do safely on your own and which activities you may need help with.
  - Take part in physical and rehabilitation activities provided in hospital. These activities can help you recover faster.
  - Stay mobile. If you are safe and feel confident about your movement and balance, then try to do as much as you can for yourself. It is important to be as independent as possible.
  - If staff have asked you to have a nurse or other person with you when you go for a walk, always use the nursing call bell and wait until a staff member comes to assist you before you get out of bed.
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- Ask for help if you need it or feel unsafe.

### **Tips for preventing falls in hospital**

Some simple actions can help prevent falls:

- Don't rush – take your time to slowly get up from lying to sitting, and then sitting to standing.
- Get your balance before moving away from the bed or chair.
- Be aware of the things around you, and watch for spills or objects in the way.
- Ask hospital staff to move furniture or other items that may cause a fall or trip.
- Report any concerns to staff.
- Be careful walking around in the dark, especially going to the toilet at night.
- Always use your walking frame, walking stick or other mobility aid if one has been recommended.
- Always apply the brakes on wheelchairs, walking frames and beds (as they can move without warning).
- If you cannot easily get in and out of your bed or chair (because it is too low or too high), ask staff to lower or raise the bed or to find another more suitable chair. Some chairs can be adjusted.

Talk to hospital staff about other ways you can prevent falls and injuries from falls. This may include equipment that reduces the risk of an injury, such as hip protectors, and rails on the sides of your bed.

If you do fall, keep calm and call for help.

### **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Nursing staff
- Allied health staff

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National Ageing Research Institute (NARI)

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