

Falls Prevention

A fall occurs when an individual suddenly comes to rest on the ground unintentionally. Falls are caused by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic factors are specific to the individual, such as muscle strength, balance, fear of falling, visual and sensory impairments, and impaired cognition. On the other hand, extrinsic factors are environmental hazards such as slippery floors, cluttered walkways, low seat and low bed height.

Falls can lead to complications such as head injuries, fractures, an increased fear of falling, which can ultimately lead to a significant decline in mobility and functional independence. In severe cases, it may even cause permanent disability or death.

An individual is at risk of recurrent falls if the risk factors have not been fully reduced or adequately addressed. This can adversely affect the individual's independence, which increases the burden of the caregiver and contributes to caregiver's stress. A comprehensive falls prevention assessment to identify risk factors and subsequent intervention can enable individuals to live actively, independently and safely at home or in the community. This will give families and their caregivers a greater peace of mind, and allow them to cope well with patient care.

What does falls prevention involve?

Falls prevention aims to identify and address the various intrinsic and extrinsic factors that would predispose an individual to a fall. It is a multi-disciplinary effort that may involve healthcare professionals such as doctors, nurses, medical social workers, physiotherapists, and occupational therapists. It also requires a combination of patient and family education, community support, home modifications and prescription of suitable mobility aids, specifically tailored to each individual's needs.

The physiotherapist will assess the musculoskeletal system of the individual. This includes, but is not limited to, joint range of motion, muscular strength and length, balance and functional status. Appropriate exercises will be recommended based on these assessment findings. The physiotherapist may also prescribe walking aids, with the aim of improving stability during standing tasks, walking and/or climbing stairs.

The occupational therapist will assess the individual's performance in daily activities and explore his/her home environment and daily routine. Based on the assessment, advice on the suitability of the home environment and recommendations for home modifications and equipment will be provided. The occupational therapist will collaboratively discuss fall prevention strategies with the individual, caregiver and family, and provide opportunities for practice during the activities of day-to-day living. Caregiver training can also be conducted by either the physiotherapist or occupational therapist as required.

Useful websites

[Falls – NHS UK](#)

[You can prevent falls](#)

[Prevent Falls and Fractures](#)

[Caregiver Tips to Prevent Falls in the Elderly](#)

[Preventing Falls – keeping elderly safe from injury](#)