

In Australia falls are the leading cause of injury related deaths in people over the age of 65. Approximately 33-55% of people over 65 years old have a fall each year. Of those who fall 20% will sustain an injury that requires medical attention, and around 10% of all falls result in a broken bone. People who have a preexisting condition such as polio that causes muscle weakness and associated joint pathology are predisposed to falls.

Injury following a fall is likely to lead to a loss of mobility and independence. It is therefore vital that, where possible, falls are prevented.

Environmental Factors

Most falls occur within or around the home, and with a few simple measures some of the risk factors can be reduced.

Floors

You are most likely to slip on polished floors or trip on loose mats.

- Make sure your floor at home is carpeted or finished with unglazed tiles.
- Where possible remove all loose mats. If you have a favourite you don't want to get rid of make sure it is secured firmly to the floor with a non-slip underlay.
- Bathroom and kitchen floors are potential hazards especially when they are wet. Make sure you mop up any spills immediately to prevent an accident.
- Areas which are frequently wet, such as the floor of the shower, can be made more safe with the use of a non-slip mat, unglazed tiles, non-slip self adhesive tape or non-slip paint.
- Hand rails may also be beneficial to provide extra support.

Lighting

- You are less likely to fall or have an accident when you can see what is around you.
- Make sure that your home is well lit especially in dark areas such as the hallway or stairwell.
- When moving around at

night ensure that you turn all available lights on and give your eyes time to adjust before heading off.

- If you get up often overnight a night light may be useful.

Furniture

- Having appropriate furniture at home can make moving around a lot easier and less of a struggle.
- A good height chair with arm rests is easier to get out of than a low chair without support.
- A firm bed will provide you with more support for rolling on and getting on and off than a soft mattress.
- Make sure that your house is not cluttered with furniture, and that you have enough space to move freely.
- Ensure that all windows and doorways are easily accessible.

Electrical Appliances

- Make sure that the electrical cords from all your appliances are tucked well out of the way - not running across the floor.
- Do not leave fans and heaters in the middle of rooms.
- Telephones and their cords should be stored safely away on a bench top.

Stairs and Steps

- Stairs are potential causes of accidents. You obviously

can't remove them from your home, but make sure they are well lit, have a good non-slip surface and are in good repair.

- Make sure rails are installed on at least one, if not both, sides of the steps to aid your balance.
- If you are at all anxious about ascending or descending stairs or steps ask someone to accompany you.
- Ensure that all steps have contrast strips attached.

Outside the Home

- Make sure your paths are kept clean, dry and even and are kept free of wet slippery leaves and moss.
- Ensure that all obstacles such as steps or exposed tree roots are highly visible. You may choose to paint the edge of these with white paint, or cover them with a non-slip surface.
- Ensure that all garden tools (including the hose) are stored away from the walking areas.
- Overhanging foliage or branches should be pruned well back from walkways and the entrances to your home.

Prevention is aimed at addressing ALL of the factors that may contribute to a fall.



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Multidisciplinary team:

Rehabilitation Medicine Specialist

Physiotherapists

Orthotist

Occupational Therapist

Clinics:

Specialist assessment

Care planning



a service of ParaQuad Victoria

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Services include:

Information & Support

Polio Support Groups

Polio Information Sessions

'Polio Vic News' Newsletter

Workshops & Seminars

Links to health professionals

& other service providers

Speaking Engagements

Immunisation Awareness

Behavioural Factors

- Avoid risk taking and always ask for help when required.
- Wear well fitting shoes with non-slip soles.
- Avoid long clothing which you may trip over, especially nighties and dressing gowns.
- Check that the rubber stoppers on your walking sticks or crutches are well maintained and not worn out.
- Avoid hurrying.
- Move slowly when rising from a bed or chair, this is a common time to lose your balance due to dizziness or unsteadiness on your feet.
- Have regular medical check ups, especially if you feel dizzy or unbalanced when standing.
- Get your eyes checked regularly.
- Exercise for strength and balance.
- Eat a well balanced nutritious diet, with plenty of calcium.
- Use a tray to carry objects.
- Sit down rather than standing on one leg when getting dressed.
- Hip protectors may prevent a fracture in an individual who is at high risk of sustaining an injury.

- If you fall, keep a falls diary, noting the type of fall and what contributed to it.

Medications

- Medication optimisation by your doctor, of not only prescribed medications, but over the counter and natural remedies as well.

REMEMBER

Take extra care if unwell or in unfamiliar situations.

What to do if you have a fall.

DON'T PANIC
Remember,
once you are on the
floor you can't fall
any further!

- There is no need to panic and rush to try to get up.
- Take a moment to make sure that you are alright. If you are alright, try to get up once you feel more calm, and less shaken.
- Use assistance where possible, from another person, stable furniture or a walking aid.
- Make sure that you seek medical assistance for any injury you may have sustained.
- Also see a doctor if you are unsure of the cause of your fall. You may have had a black out and can't remember what happened, or you could have had unexplained dizziness.
- If you can't get up, you will need to get some help. You could call out to anyone who may be home or nearby. If no one responds to your cries for help, see if you can crawl to a telephone or the front door to get some assistance.
- If you cannot summon help you may have to wait until you are found. If this is the case try to make yourself as comfortable as possible and keep yourself warm.
- Some people who are fearful of falling, or who have had falls in the past may have a personal alarm. This will ensure that if you fall when you are alone you can press your buzzer for assistance.

Planning

- if possible, practice getting up off the floor. Ask your physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist (OT) to teach you how to

get up.

The Occupational Therapist (OT) at Polio Services Victoria is trained and experienced in assessing environmental factors in the home which are related to safety when performing daily living tasks.

If you have any concerns with regard to regular falls or loss of balance please phone Polio Services to arrange a home assessment with the OT.

There are specialised Falls and Balance Clinics which cater for the specific needs of individuals. Find out more by calling Polio Services Victoria.