



Avoiding a fall

Introduction

Falls are very common in older people or those living with life limiting conditions. At St Luke's, we are keen to work with you and your relatives to identify any risk factors that may minimise your risk of falling.

In this leaflet, you can read some of the main causes of falls. Take time to read through this leaflet and raise any concerns with a member of staff who can help signpost you to the right support.

Reduced mobility, poor balance and muscle weakness

If there has been a change in your mobility, muscle strength or energy levels, you are at risk of falling. This could be due to being unwell or spending longer periods in bed, causing you to feel weaker than usual.

These factors could also affect your confidence in moving around, leading to an increased anxiety to participate in physical activity. This could lead to further decrease in mobility levels.

Maintaining good balance is equally important. Balance can be affected by a number of factors including vision, abnormal sensation or inner ear problems. Balance can be improved through a specific programme of exercises and/or provision of equipment.

If appropriate, you may be referred to see a physiotherapist who can help you improve your muscle strength, mobility and balance. There may also be opportunities for you to engage in St Luke's group activity sessions – just ask us to find out more.

Cognitive impairment, confusion and dementia

Sudden onset of confusion is often caused by an acute medical condition such as infection, diabetes, delirium and some medications, it can also be related to your disease. If you or your relative notice that you are more confused than normal, please tell one of the team and we can look into this further.

Being in an unfamiliar environment can also be disorientating for those with a known cognitive impairment or dementia. It is good to have items surrounding you that are familiar to you to help with this.

Confusion can increase the risk of falls due to not accepting help that might be needed, wandering, not using required equipment or trying to complete tasks you may not be physically able to. If this is the case, then more support may be needed to reduce the risk of falling.



Environment

A safe environment is important in reducing the risk of falling.

Environmental risks include cluttered rooms and corridors, poorly fitting carpets, uneven flooring, slippery surfaces, stairs, inappropriate heights of bed/chair/toilet, walking aids out of reach and poor lighting.

Medication

The use of four or more medications has been shown to be a strong risk factor for falls. Some medications such as sedatives, strong painkillers and anti-depressants can cause confusion, dizziness or drowsiness. When starting new medication, it is worthwhile speaking to your Doctor or Pharmacist about any potential side effects they may have on your balance or cognition.



Continence

Incontinence can lead to a risk of falling. Some people may experience difficulties with bladder control. This can present a risk of falls, particularly if urine is present on the floor or if there is a sudden need to reach the toilet quickly. In some situations, rushing to the toilet may increase the likelihood of a slip, trip, or fall.

If you have any concerns regarding incontinence, please speak to a member of staff who can help with continence aids or toileting equipment.

Foot health and footwear

Poorly fitting shoes can cause sore feet and unsteadiness. Shoes should have a non-slip sole and slippers should have a heel back and not 'slip-ons.' If possible, shoes with velcro straps are easier to put on and present a minimal trip hazard.



Vision and hearing

If you have a visual or hearing impairment, it is important that your glasses are always within reach and where possible. Ensure that you are wearing your hearing aids and have spare batteries to hand.

Nutrition and hydration

Good nutrition is important for many aspects of health. Good nutritional intake ensures a sufficient diet to maintain physical function, strength and good bone health. Being well hydrated can help regulate your blood pressure and body temperature, support the vital organs and transport minerals and nutrients around the body. Water is best for this.



Bone health

Reduced bone health or strength could mean a fracture is more likely if you fall. Exercise is the best way to maintain bone strength to prevent complications from falling.

We understand that the ability to exercise can be impacted by pain, weakness and disease so help can be provided to support your mobility needs and strength with the aim to maintain as much independence as possible.



If any of the factors in this leaflet are things that you or your family are worried about or feel you are struggling with, please don't hesitate to contact the St Luke's team for more information.

This can be the nurses or physiotherapists in the community who visit or any of the staff on the ward. We are always more than happy to help and carry out the appropriate assessments to best suit your needs.

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