

Preventing Falls

A Guide for Seniors



Information booklet for older people in the
Corangamite, Glenelg, Moyne, Southern Grampians &
Warrnambool Shires



An initiative of the 'Foothold on Safety (SW) Falls Prevention Project, the SW Sub-Regional Falls Prevention Project and the Southern Grampians & Glenelg PCP.

Electronic copies can be obtained through Lyndoch Community Services 5561 9394 (also www.lyndoch.org.au), SW-PCP 5563 1242, or SG&G PCP 5551 8471 (also www.sggpcp.com).

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How serious are falls?

About one in three people over the age of 65 will fall each year. For older people, falls are now the leading cause of injury-related deaths, hospital admissions and visits to emergency departments. Fractures account for 80% of fall related deaths, of which there are approximately 250 annually in Victoria. The home is the most common place for falls to occur.

Although the risk factors increase with age, falls are not an inevitable part of ageing. Preventing falls may even save your life! Use this booklet to assess the risks and plan the necessary changes. Your plan can then be discussed with health care and service providers.

Medication effects on the body

- Do you take sedatives or sleeping pills?
- Do you take fluid tablets or blood pressure pills?
- Do you take 4 or more medications?
- Do you get dizzy when you stand up or walk?
- Do you have problems understanding your medications?
- Do you drink more than two glasses of alcohol per day?
- Are you unsteady on your feet and don't know why?

If you have difficulties with any of the above you should discuss them with your health professional.

Suggestions and contacts

- If a medication is causing side effects, such as becoming unsteady, shaky, dizzy, confused or drowsy, or if you have a fall, speak to your doctor or pharmacist immediately. Ask about a home medication review.
- Avoid taking medication and alcohol together. Alcohol can add to the risk of falling by affecting your alertness, judgement, physical coordination and reaction time.
- Always know why you are taking medications and what side effects they have. Keep a chart, including instructions. Use a dosage counter pack.
- If anxiety is a problem, ask your health care professional about learning other ways to improve sleep patterns, to avoid sedation

Who to contact

- The District Nursing service can assist with medication if you are having difficulties with self management.
- Ask your pharmacist for drug information and whether any of your medications will cause unsteadiness or other side effects. Pharmacists can suggest ways to better manage your medications

Actions planned

1. _____

2. _____

Balance, strength and falls

- Do you have weak legs, pain or stiffness in joints?
- Are you unsteady when you walk?
- Are you already having falls or near misses?
- Do you become unsteady when you turn around?
- Do you trip when you walk?
- Are you having trouble using steps or stairs?
- Is it difficult for you to get up from a chair?
- Is it difficult or are you unable to get up from the floor?



If you have ticked any of the above, you need to discuss these with your health care provider.

Suggestions and contacts

- When getting up, especially from bed, sit on the edge of the bed and allow your body to adapt. Getting up too quickly can cause your blood pressure to drop rapidly, causing you to fall.
- When turning, take several smaller steps, **do not turn suddenly**.
- Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists can provide exercise programs and equipment to improve balance, strength and walking. They can be accessed through health services or privately in some areas. Equipment may include walking frames, shower chairs or rails in your home. Mobility aids should always be fitted and used correctly
- Your doctor can refer you to a Physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist, Community Rehabilitation Centre or In-Home Rehab Services to provide the necessary therapies with a team approach.

Actions planned

1. _____

2. _____

Fear of falling

- Are you scared that you will fall?
- Have you had falls or broken bones already?
- Do you avoid activities because you might fall?
- Are you staying home more because you have fallen or are afraid you might fall?
- Could you do more things if you were not scared of falling?



Fear of falling or loss of confidence sometimes occurs after a fall. This can lead to a vicious cycle of stopping activities which in turn reduces muscle tone and strength. If you ticked any of the above you should seek assistance.

Suggestions

- Become aware if you are afraid of falling and how it is affecting your activities and mobility
- If you live alone a personal alarm or cordless telephone can give you greater confidence to keep moving in and around the house. Personal alarms are usually worn as pendants around the neck or as bracelets.
- **Hip protectors** are protective shields that fit into side pockets in special underwear garments. They can be effective in reducing hip fractures. Talk to your health care professional about these or call **South West Healthcare Supplies, Tel: 5564 4105 or Fax: 5563 1660**, for further information and orders.

Who to contact

- An Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist can assist with strategies to return to previous activities. Physiotherapists can help by providing exercises and strategies to increase confidence and mobility. Occupational Therapists can discuss what can be done to make the environment safer.
- For information regarding personal alarm suppliers to South West Victoria, contact **Safety Link, Freecall 1800 813 617 or Vital Call 1300 360 808.**

Actions planned

1. _____

2. _____

Physical activity

- Do you exercise less than 3 three times a week for 15 -20 minutes?
- Do you find it difficult to exercise due to arthritis, heart problems or other conditions?
- Have you been inactive for a long time?
- Do you experience stiffness when moving or muscle weakness?

If you ticked any of the above you should seek guidance from a health professional. Physical strength is particularly important to keep mobile and prevent falls and injury. Exercise is good for your heart, bones, muscle and balance. It also helps you to control your weight and your mental well-being.

Suggestions

- For older people, walking groups, gentle exercise groups. Tai Chi, water exercises, dancing and strength and balance exercises are recommended.
- People with medical conditions should gain a medical clearance before beginning an exercise program and should find a supervised program, i.e. Physiotherapist, Nurse or Fitness Leader, trained to provide classes.

Who to contact

- Most health services and senior citizens centres in the Corangamite, Glenelg, Southern Grampians, Moyne and Warrnambool shires run a range of suitable gentle exercise and strength training programs for seniors. Some fitness centres also run groups for older people. Contact **COTA (Council On The Ageing) on 1800 136 181 or Arthritis Victoria Telephone Information Service 1800 011 041** for resources and other information www.arthritisvic.org.au
- Your doctor or physiotherapist can advise you on individual exercise programs, for example at a Community Rehabilitation Centre, Health Service or through In Home Rehabilitation, if specialised exercise is needed.

Actions planned

1. _____

2. _____

Vision

- Do you have double or blurred vision?
- Do you have difficulty seeing steps clearly?
- Do you have difficulty seeing objects on the ground?
- Do you have difficulty seeing in dim light or glare?
- Has it been more than 12 months since you had your eyes tested?
- Do you have difficulty walking with bifocals on?
- Have you fallen over things you could not see properly?



If you ticked any of the above you should talk to your doctor or optometrist. Poor vision adds to the risk of falls.

Suggestions

- Have your eyes tested each year by an optometrist.
- Explain to your doctor or optometrist the difficulties you are having with everyday activities.
- Avoid glare by using a hat or sunglasses and eliminate glare in your home by using light shades and curtains. Avoid bi-focals outdoors
- Automatic sensor lights and touch lamps beside your bed can assist at night. Keep glasses handy at all times. Use a glasses chain.
- Seek information from Vision Australia about managing low vision, whilst still maintaining independence in the home.

Who to contact

- If you suffer low vision, advice is available through **Vision Australia Information Line Freecall 1800 331 000**
- Contact your local council or shire home service to correct any safety or tripping hazards around your home, ie. paint edges of steps to make them visible.

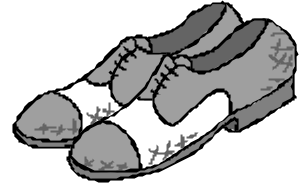
Actions planned

1. _____

2. _____

Feet and footwear

- Do you wear slippery or loose fitting shoes?
- Do your shoes have narrow heels or are worn and old?
- Do you wear scuffs or sling-backs?
- Are your shoes too big or too small?
- Do you have any foot problems that affect your walking?
- Are your shoes loose or unsupportive or without fasteners?



Even if a shoe or slipper looks alright, if it doesn't fit or the soles are worn, it's dangerous. Foot problems such as diabetes, ingrown toenails, fallen arches or misshapen toes contribute to falls. Investing money in good shoes and slippers is inexpensive compared to the costs from injury.

Suggestions

- Walking shoes are best suited for daily activities. Make sure your shoes are firm and supportive around the heels and the instep of your feet. They should be flexible and have enough room around your toes. Shoes with laces or Velcro fasteners are best.
- Flat shoes offer good stability. Choose a flat sole with a broad heel to increase the amount of sole that has contact with the ground. A shoe with a rounded edge to the heel is also safer.
- Avoid scuffs, thongs and slippers. Do not wear your socks without your shoes. Choose foot wear that is enclosed front and back.
- Keep the soles of your shoes clean. They can become very slippery from dirt, grease and dust.

Who to contact

- See a podiatrist or doctor for help with feet problems. Podiatry is available through most health services and privately in some areas.
- A podiatrist can advise you on correct shoes, as can good shoe shops.

Actions planned

1. _____

2. _____

Nutrition and healthy bones

- Have you had a recent unintentional weight loss?
- Do you have osteoporosis?
- Do you have a poor appetite?
- Do you have difficulty getting groceries or preparing meals?
- Do you have less than 3 serves of dairy food a day?
- Do you have difficulty chewing or swallowing food?

You can be at greater risk of falls if you do not have adequate nutrition. It is particularly important as you get older to keep up your calcium reserves to maintain strong bones. Recent research has indicated that vitamin D with calcium can also help prevent bone thinning and osteoporosis.

Suggestions

- Eat at least 3 serves a day of calcium rich foods, eg: milk, cheese, yoghurt, salmon bones, green leafy vegetables.
- 20 minutes of sunlight in times of low UV levels twice a week is recommended for adequate Vitamin D. Avoid the middle of the day.
- People with weakened bones, or reduced muscle strength may benefit from wearing hip protectors. See earlier details under 'Fear of Falling'.

Who to contact

- If you experience reduced appetite or unexplained weight loss, tell your doctor. You may benefit from advice by a dietician and or calcium supplements
- Contact home services at your council or shire if you need help with shopping or meals
- If you have osteoporosis, speak to your doctor about difficulties and contact your local health service for an osteoporosis support program. Contact **Osteoporosis Australia Helpline** for further information **Freecall 1800 242 141** or **www.osteoporosis.org.au**
- Speech Pathology can assist with swallowing difficulties and can be arranged through most health services.

Actions planned

1. _____
2. _____

General health problems

There are many health conditions that contribute to falls. These include:

- diseases of muscles, bones and joints such as arthritis and osteoporosis
- heart disease or high or low blood pressure
- metabolic diseases such as diabetes
- lung disease such as emphysema or bronchitis
- neurological and nervous system disorders such as Parkinson's Disease, multiple sclerosis or stroke.

You should have regular checkups with your general practitioner to help prevent worsening of any condition you may have and to keep you as active as possible. Short-term illness such as urinary tract infections, diarrhoea and chest infections can also contribute to risk of falling. It is important if you feel unwell to seek medical treatment. It is a good idea to ask family, friends, neighbours or local services to assist with things like shopping, cooking and personal care if you are unwell, to avoid serious falls.

Incontinence (loss of bladder or bowel control), frequency (going to the toilet often), urgency (going in a rush) and nocturia (getting up to the toilet more than twice a night) all pose serious risks for falls, especially at night.

Suggestions and contacts

- You can seek help for these conditions from a continence advisor who will advise on bladder and bowel conditions, how to improve control, how to manage your condition and which continence aids are suitable. Continence treatment can be arranged through most health services or you can ring the **National Continence Help Line 1800 330 366**, **www.continence.health.gov.au**. A handy reference is available at **www.toiletmapp.gov.au**.
- Continence aids are available from **South West Healthcare Medical Supplies Tel: 5564 4105**, supermarkets, and pharmacies.

Home Safety Checklist

The majority of falls resulting in serious injury occur within the home, most within the lounge room or bedroom. Work through rooms and the garden to identify and remove hazards:

- Are there any loose mats or rugs inside your house?
- Are there any floor coverings that are not fitted securely or that are torn or worn?
- Is there any furniture that obstructs your movements or that clutters the room?
- Are there appliances or cords crossing your floors?
- Are your floors ever slippery?
- Do you have difficulty with showering, dressing or using the toilet?
- Do you have poorly lit areas in your house?
- Do you have difficulty getting out of your chair?
- Do you have poor lighting outside your house entrance?
- Are there hoses, weeds, moss, bushes or any other objects that may obstruct your path outside?
- Are any pathways broken or uneven and steps in disrepair?
- Do you feel unsafe gardening, walking around the house or on uneven ground?

Suggestions

- Call the local Council or Shire Home and Community Care Program or District Nursing Service for information on assistance with showering, meals or other daily tasks. A range of in-home support and garden and home maintenance services are available.
- Contact an Occupational Therapist through your local health service to advise you about what could help to make life easier and safer for you.
- The South Western **Aged Care Assessment Service (ACAS)** is a regional service that assists older people to remain living at home as long as possible. Discuss a possible assessment with your health care professional or call ACAS on **5561 9351** for further information
- Remove unsecured floor coverings, extension cords, garden hoses.

Hazards in the community

Many falls in the community happen to active, healthy older persons as well as persons with impaired mobility. Although the local council may sometimes be delayed in responding to reported hazards, all hazards will be registered and inspected. They are actioned on a priority basis. Reporting by the community is useful as it raises awareness within the local council of the extent of the problems.

Suggestions

- Always try to use footpaths if possible. Avoid damaged footpaths or rough ground with loose or uneven surfaces. Be aware of kerbs, overhanging branches and changing levels, especially at entrances to buildings.
- Contact your local council if an area or building is hazardous or in need of repair. Customer Service Lines can be called on:

Corangamite Shire Council 5593 7100

Glenelg Shire Council 5522 2200

Southern Grampians Shire Council 5573 0444

Moyne Shire Council 5568 2600

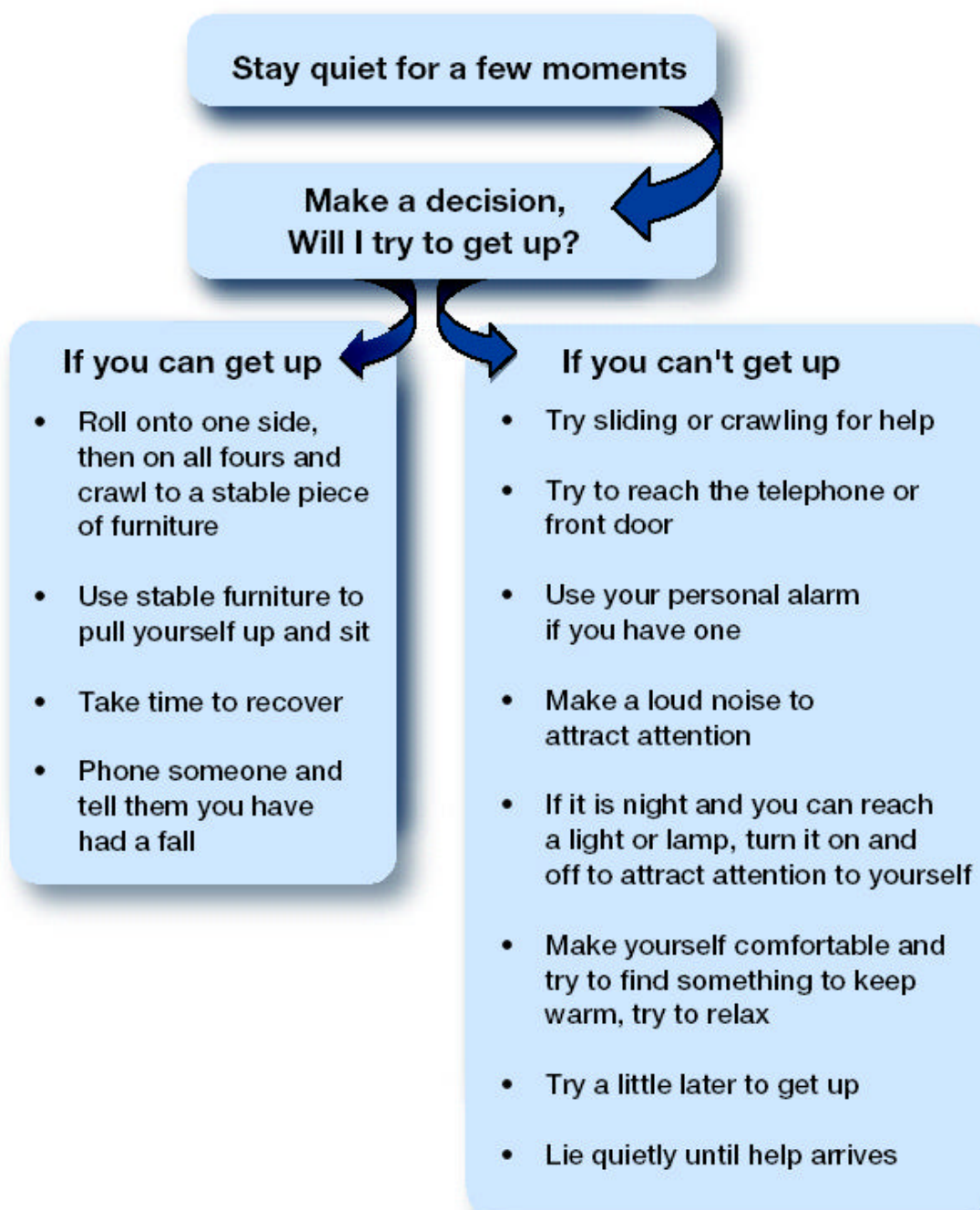
Warrnambool City Council 5564 7800

- Always keep an eye out for bicycles, toys, pets, or other objects which may be in the way. Allow yourself time to cross roads safely, use pedestrian crossings if available.
- Avoid sun glare.
- If you use public transport, take your time. Keep one hand free to hold a rail and always look at the step. Ask the bus driver to wait until you are seated before taking off.

Great gifts and bright ideas

When relatives or friends ask for a gift suggestion, offer one of the following items that could greatly increase your safety and well-being. You may like to give these 'safety gifts' to others:

- Touch lamps for beside the bed at night.
- New shoes that are safe and secure.
- A portable phone that can be kept beside you so that you don't have to rush to answer it when it rings.
- Sensor lights for night time, both inside and outside the house.
- Sunglasses and sun hats to reduce glare when you are outside.
- A personal alarm service and a whistle to enable you to get help.
- A magnifying glass to read the phone book and medication bottles.
- A non slip bath mat to prevent falls on the wet bathroom floor.
- A glasses rope to hang- your glasses around your neck so you always have them handy.
- A torch for the bedside in case of power failures or for outside.
- A set of hip protectors or extra hip-protector briefs. Try 'Hand Fashion By Marion'.
Ph: 5568 4251 or mobile: 0408 527 578



A telephone on a wall or bench is no use if you fall, keep it on a low table. A portable phone is helpful. Put your important phone numbers in the phone memory dial. If you find someone who has fallen and can't get up, don't try lifting them. They may have a serious injury and you may hurt yourself lifting them. **Call 000** for an ambulance.

Physical activity programs for seniors

CORANGAMITE, MOYNE & WARRNAMBOOL SHIRES:

Please phone for details and locations

Manifold Place(Camperdown, SWH) - 5593 1892

- Relaxation programs • Walk and talk program • Pilates classes in evening

Cobden and District Health Service - 5595 3100

- Exercise classes • Tai Chi for Arthritis
- 'Stretch, Tone, Relax and Strengthen' Program

Timboon and District Health Service - 5558 6000

- Tai Chi • Gentle exercise groups • Strength training (Power Pals) • Walking group

Lismore Campus (South West Healthcare) 5558 3000

- Strength Training (Power Pals) classes • Gentle Exercises and Aerobics (Pilates)
- Walking group • Gym available • Tai Chi classes.

Terang Campus (Terang and Mortlake Health Service) - 5592 0232

- Tai Chi for arthritis • Walking Group

Macarthur Campus (South West Healthcare) - 5552 2000

- Tai Chi • Strength training (Power Pals) • Pilates

Moyne Health Service - 5568 0100

- Strength Training (Power Pals) • Tai Chi • Circuit Gym
- 'Walk and Talk' group • Gym Ball Classes

Mortlake Campus (Terang and Mortlake Health Service) - 5558 7000

- Strength Training (Power Pals) • Tai Chi

Archie Graham Senior Citizens Club - 5564 7920

- Strength training • Gentle Exercises groups • Tai Chi groups
- Walking group • Line dancing

Aquazone Warrnambool - 5560 5887

- 'Fit for Life' low impact fitness program • Land and pool aerobics , low impact
- Pilates classes

Action Leisure Centre, Warrnambool - 5562 5050

- 'Living Stronger, Living Longer', COTA program

South West Healthcare Physiotherapy Department - 5563 1490

- Balance classes • Exercise classes • Water exercises • Progression to community programs

Physical activity programs for seniors

SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS & GLENELG SHIRES:

Please phone for full details and locations

Portland District Health – Community Health - 5521 7174

- Tai Chi, Fawthrop Lagoon Walking Group, Walk & Talk Program, Water Exercise for People with Arthritis

Portland Health & Aquatic Centre - 5521 7174

- *Living Longer, Living Stronger* Strength Training; SWEAT Program for people with MS

Vitality Health Fitness Centre, Hamilton - 5571 9734

- *Living Longer, Living Stronger* Strength Training

Coleraine District Health Service - 5553 2000

- Coleraine Walking Group; Pilates Mat workout, Silver Sneakers – chair exercise program

Heywood Rural Health & Glenelg Outreach Services - Glenelg Outreach Services,

Heywood - 5527 0570

- Healthy Ageing Group Strength & Balance Training, Tai Chi, Modified exercise programs, community sessions – **Merino, Narrawong, Dartmoor.**

Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation - 5527 2051

- Physical Instructors, Gym; group and individual programs.

Penshurst & District Health Service - 5552 3000

- Strength & Balance Training

Balmoral Bush Nursing Service, Balmoral - 5570 1304

- Strength & Balance Training

Casterton Memorial Hospital - 5554 2555

- Exercise for People with a Chronic Illness; General Practitioner Referral Required.

Tai Chi, Casterton - (08) 87257621

- *Harmony Natural Therapy Centre*- Tai Chi

Casterton Community Centre - 5581 2139

- *Beyond the Farm Gate* – walking program for rural women

Exercise with Lucinda Jenkins, Casterton - 5582 0257

- Aerobic exercise, floor exercises and the use of light weights.

Western District Health Service, Frances Hewett Community Centre, Hamilton - 5551 8450

- *Heart Take Part*, Strength & Balance Training Program, moderate level (basic stepping, some dancing/stepping); Very Gentle (chair based only)

Upper & lower body resistance training (sitting & standing);

Start Staying Strong, Hydrotherapy for Arthritis

David Skene Tai Chi Classes, Hamilton - 5571 2436

- Tai Chi for all ages.

Pat's Prime Movers, Hamilton - 5572 1011

- Weight bearing exercise for the fit older adult. Total Stretch - chair/floor based exercise for the fit older adult.

OR CONTACT YOUR LOCAL HEALTH SERVICE, FITNESS CENTRE OR SHIRE TO FIND OUT
ABOUT LOCAL ACTIVITIES

ARE YOU A VETERANS AFFAIRS WHITE OR GOLD CARD HOLDER ?

IF SO, YOU ARE ELIGIBLE FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE VIA THE
'HOMEFRONT PROGRAM '

Homefront is a falls and accident prevention program designed to provide practical help
to veterans in the home.

Homefront provides a free home assessment by trained assessors who will identify falls
and accident hazards in and around the home.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PHONE FREECALL: 1800 026 185