Falls

Who is at risk?
Everyone is potentially at risk of having a fall, but certain groups of people are more vulnerable than others. These groups are:

- adults over 65
- children
- people whose jobs involve working at heights

Older adults
Some older adults have a combination of health-related factors that increase their risk of having a fall, such as:

- muscle weakness
- problems with balance and mobility
- poor eyesight

Around 30% of adults who are over 65 and who are living at home will experience at least one fall a year. This figure rises to 50% for those who are living in nursing homes or residential care.

Not all falls will result in injury, but a significant minority do. For example, 20% of older adults will need medical attention for a fall, and 5% will have a serious injury, such as a fracture (the medical term for a broken bone).

Falls can also reduce confidence, especially in older people. A fall can sometimes result in a person losing confidence, becoming withdrawn and feeling like they have lost their independence.

Children
Due to the natural impulse to play and take part in risky behaviour, most children will experience a fall at least once during childhood. Thankfully, falls in children are seldom fatal, but they often require medical attention.

Each year in the UK, an estimated 390,000 children are taken to accident and emergency (A&E) following a fall.

Causes
Common causes of slips, trips and falls include:

- unsafe ladders
- unsafe stairs, steep stairs or slopes
- slippery surfaces
• obstructions
• poor footwear
• untidy areas
• running
• low lighting
• hurried or careless movements
• distractions
• poor manual handling, carrying large objects incorrectly and not having your hands free to break your fall

**General advice**
Making small changes in and around your home can make a big difference in reducing accidents. Some general advice for preventing falls includes:

• mop up spills straight away
• remove clutter and trailing wires
• use non-slip mats and rugs
• use high wattage bulbs in lights and torches so you can see clearly
• organise your home so that climbing, stretching and bending are kept to a minimum, and so you do not bump into things
• get help to do things that you can't do safely
• do not walk on slippery floors in socks or tights and avoid wearing loose-fitting trailing clothes that might trip you up

**Advice for older adults**
Health professionals take the issue of falls prevention in older people very seriously because they know the potentially serious impact that falls can have.

Strength and balance training can be beneficial for people who are at risk of falling. Research has shown that older people who take part in regular strength and balance training are less likely to have a fall.

Medication can sometimes lead to being unsteady on your feet. If you are concerned about side effects of any medication that you or your relative are taking please talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Research from 2009 found that taking daily vitamin D and calcium supplements can strengthen muscles and bones, helping to prevent falls in people who are 65 and over. If you think that you would benefit from having daily supplements, you should speak to your GP.

If you are unable to see the floor clearly this can also lead to falling. If you are concerned that your vision might increase your risk of having a fall, you should make an appointment to have a sight test for further advice.
Advice for children

One of the most common causes of falls in toddlers is falling down the stairs. To prevent this, install protective stair guards both at the top and the bottom of your stairs.

If you have a young child, make sure bedroom windows are securely locked with a child-proof lock, but also make sure that the windows can be opened quickly in the event of a fire.

Your child should always wear a helmet when they are cycling, roller-skating or skateboarding. Children who do not wear a helmet are 14 times more likely to die if they are involved in an accident, compared with children who wear a helmet.