

Hints and tips for walking and balance

'There is always something you can do to improve your ability to move'

'Joints and muscles were designed to move'

Even if you have difficulty with moving, walking or your balance, in the majority of cases the 'right kind' of movement, activity and exercise can improve the way our muscles perform for us - **if we choose to!**

It is possible to improve our movement, the strength in our legs for walking, and get the most out of life, even when our balance is challenged (i.e. from uneven pavements, stairs, carpets and cats!).

For exercise to work it needs to be regular and the right challenge for us individually, and most importantly we need to **stick with it over time**. There is no quick fix, but we can improve what we have.

Here are some steps towards being more mobile and steadier on your feet:

- > **Be physically active everyday** (get up, move, stand, walk).
- > **Spend less time sitting**, and/or break up your sitting time if you sit for long periods. **This is proven to be very beneficial. Make moving a part of your daily routine e.g**

always walk around in TV ad breaks, or set yourself a goal of walking upstairs 4 times a day.

- > **All movement counts.** You may want to try going to an exercise class in your community, but this is not the only way to keep active. Think about what you might enjoy, such as moving around your home more, chair exercise videos, walking more (maybe go one lamppost further each day), gardening, and/or housework.
- > **Tell your GP if you have concerns** about your balance or if you have fallen - they can refer you to physiotherapy if needed, or maybe a specialist exercise programme at a local leisure centre.
- > Alternatively, you could **go direct to a physiotherapist to provide advice** and a suitable home exercise programme for balance and strength. Some areas have links online that you can use to book yourself in.

Footwear

It is better to wear comfortable shoes with cushioned non-slip soles. Try to avoid wearing heels when walking, as these can reduce your balance and stability. Footwear protects and supports your feet, so you should not walk in stockings or bare feet.

Will a walking aid help me?

Whether you already use a walking aid, or whether you are considering one to give you confidence, it is important to realise that it will not solve the entire problem. Walking aids may help greatly, as well as be recommended, but keeping muscles strong is essential even when using a walking aid. A physiotherapist can provide advice regarding your suitability for walking aids designed specifically for outdoors, if this is felt to be needed.

If you already use a walking aid:

- Ensure that it fits through your doorways, at the side of your bed and around your furniture.
- Make sure it is kept in a good condition with the rubber ends (ferrules) providing enough grip. Replacement rubber ends can be purchased in many chemists or obtained from your local physiotherapy department.
- If a replacement or duplicate walking aid (e.g. for upstairs in your home) is required, you can request one from whoever provided the aid originally.
- Only use walking aids if they have been provided to you and follow the guidance given.
- Avoid walking by holding onto walls, doors and furniture, as your hand may slip, or the furniture may tip or move, as you lean on it for support.

Seek referral to a physiotherapist for an assessment and advice if you feel unsteady, or where you feel a current walking aid is not providing you with enough support.

Falls are not a normal part of ageing and they can be prevented. Conditions such as Parkinson's Disease and impairments following a stroke can cause difficulty walking and moving around, but lots of other medical conditions can influence our balance and strength (e.g. Arthritis, poor vision, back pain). A main reason for feeling unsteady, or having balance issues, is simply the loss of muscle and increased muscle weakness. This has a direct effect on our balance and ability to walk. The good news is that we can do something about it. Regardless of age or stage of decline, and although you may need support (e.g. from physiotherapy), you can do a lot to improve your own balance and strength even in the presence of disease.