

Staying safe and independent



Slips, trips and falls – how to prevent them and stay independent

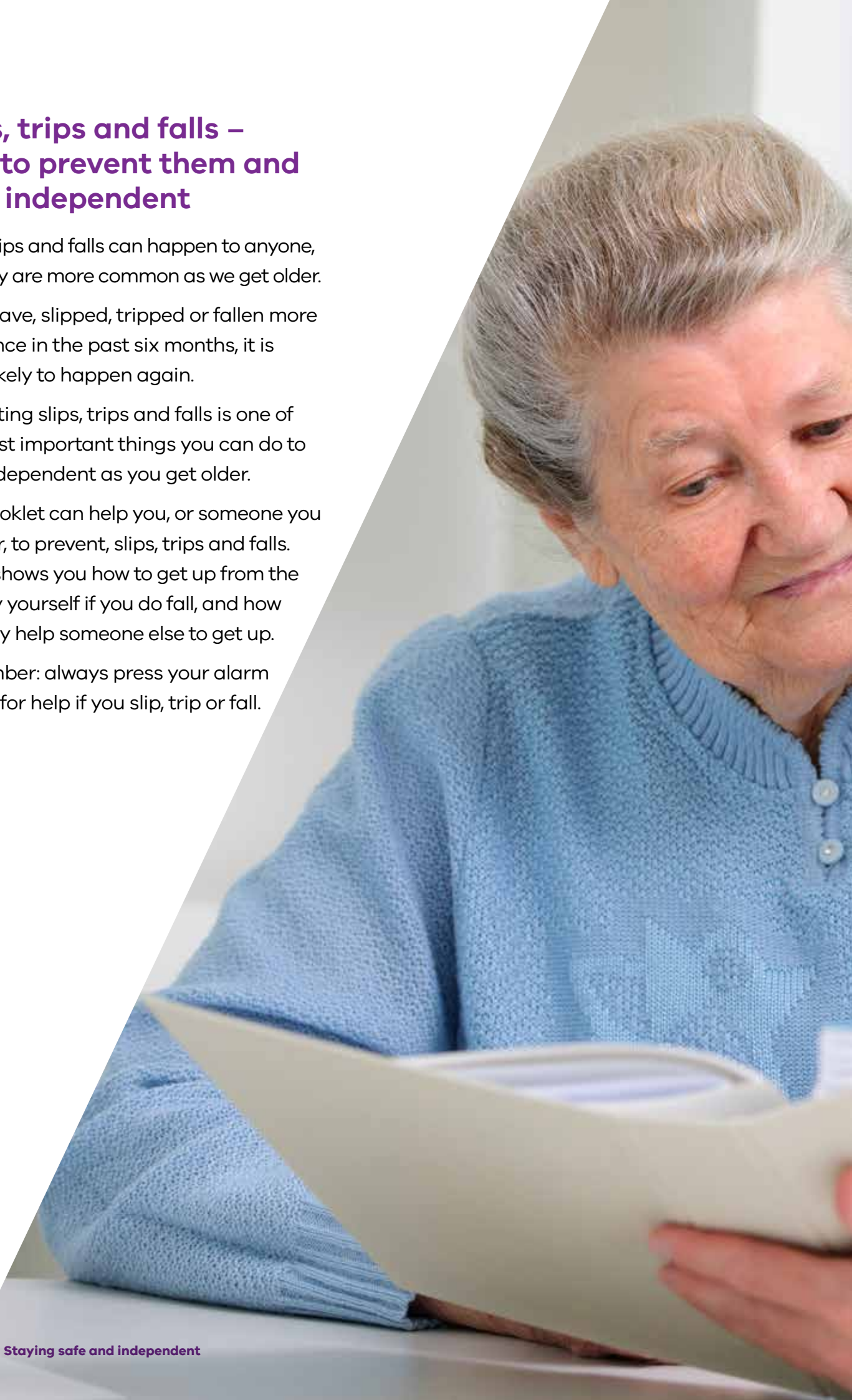
Slips, trips and falls can happen to anyone, but they are more common as we get older.

If you have, slipped, tripped or fallen more than once in the past six months, it is more likely to happen again.

Preventing slips, trips and falls is one of the most important things you can do to stay independent as you get older.

This booklet can help you, or someone you care for, to prevent, slips, trips and falls. It also shows you how to get up from the floor by yourself if you do fall, and how to safely help someone else to get up.

Remember: always press your alarm button for help if you slip, trip or fall.





Five steps to fall-proof yourself



1. Are you staying as strong as you can?

Being strong and physically active helps maintain healthy bones to keep you on your feet. While we do lose muscle as we get older, exercise can restore balance, strength and flexibility. It can prevent falls and fractures. Talk to your **doctor** or **physiotherapist** about how to increase your strength, balance and flexibility. It's never too late to start an exercise program. A **physiotherapist** can teach you simple exercises you can do at home or you can refer to the attached leaflet on home exercise or find a program that you like and take a friend.



2. Are you taking medications?

Do you feel drowsy, unsteady, dizzy or confused? Some medications can increase your risk of falls, especially if you have anxiety, depression or sleeping difficulties. Consider your alcohol intake as it can react with your medications. Talk to your **doctor** or **pharmacist** about your medications, their side effects or interactions. Ask about Vitamin D to maintain healthy bones. Take medications only as prescribed.



3. Is your home as safe as it can be?

Simple home modifications, such as reducing clutter or rugs, fixing poor lighting, installing grab bars in the bathroom and toilet and putting non-slip paint on outdoor steps can reduce the likelihood of you tripping or slipping. Talk to your **doctor** about organising an **occupational therapist (OT)** to come to your home to do a home safety check.



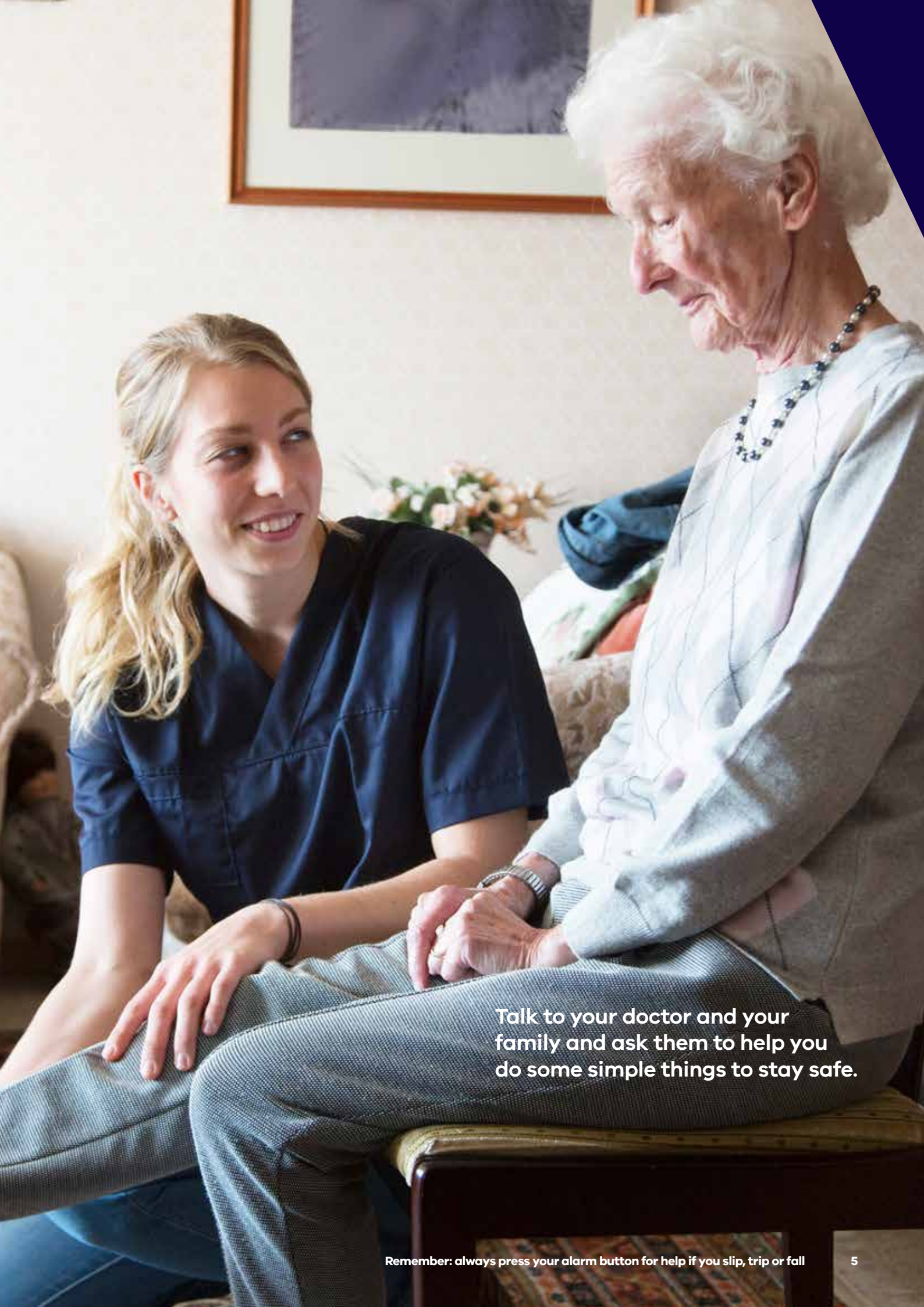
4. Is your vision changing?

Have you got new glasses? Do you see clearly? Are you able to judge distance and depth and adjust to changes in light and dark? Talk to your **optometrist** about having your eyes checked at least once a year. Update your glasses, but be aware it can take a while to get used to them.



5. Are your feet sore?

Are your feet sore, swollen or changing shape? Talk to your **doctor** or **podiatrist** about checking your feet. Wear comfortable, firm-fitting, flat shoes.



Talk to your doctor and your family and ask them to help you do some simple things to stay safe.

Knowing how to get up from the floor by yourself

It is important that you practise getting down to the floor and back up again. If it is a long time since you have tried this, wait until someone is with you to help you up if needed.

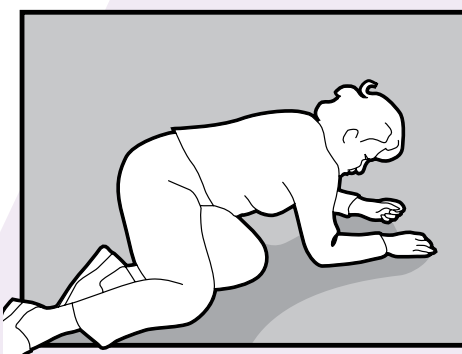
You may be more out of practice than you think.

These pictures show a common way to get up from the floor that will suit most people. People with knee problems may find it uncomfortable to kneel. Physiotherapists can teach you other ways to get up, that may suit you better, and also exercises to regain your strength and flexibility.

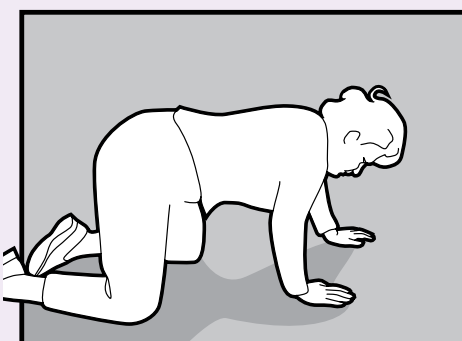
If you have fallen

- 1. Calm down.** Catch your breath and compose yourself after the shock.
- 2. Check your body.** If you are not badly injured you can think about getting up. If you are injured, for example with a broken bone, you need to stay where you are and put your plan to get help into action.
3. If you are not injured, look around for a sturdy piece of furniture (preferably a chair).

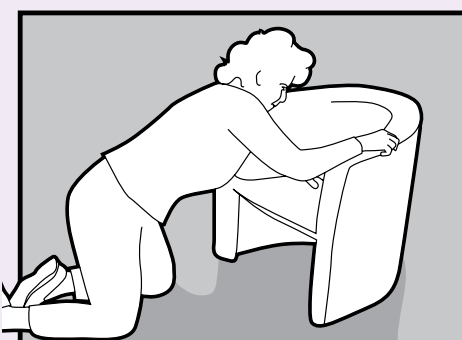
4. Roll onto your side.



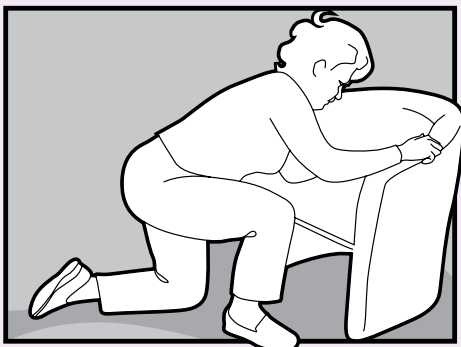
5. Crawl or drag yourself over to the chair



6. From a kneeling position, put your arms up onto the seat of the chair.



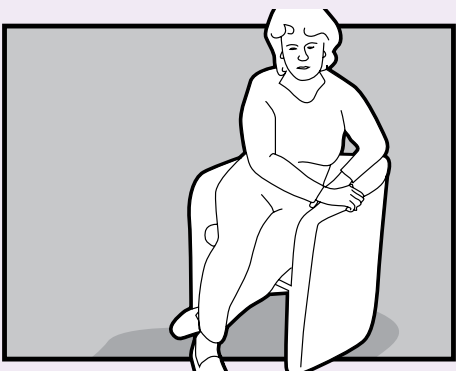
7. Bring one knee forward and put that foot on the floor.



8. Push up with your arms and legs, pivot your bottom around.



9. Sit down. Rest before trying to move.



Rest at any time, and if you do not succeed the first time, rest and try again.

Practise this until you feel confident about the steps involved. It is recommended you do this once a month or so.

If you cannot get up:

- Do not panic
- Use one of the strategies mentioned earlier. Think through all possibilities for raising the alarm and getting up
- Try to stay warm
- Gently move around to stop one part of your body getting too much pressure

After a fall

It is important to talk to your doctor about your fall and the possible causes, and to tell someone else (family, friend or neighbour) that you have fallen.

Where you can find help or advice

- A physiotherapist or occupational therapist can help you learn ways to get up.

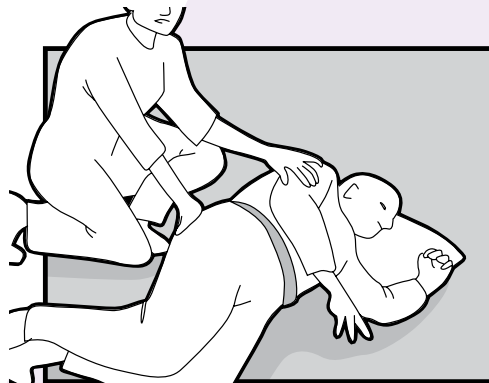
Knowing how to safely help someone to get up

If you are a carer or friend, it is important to know how to help so you can avoid injury to the person who has fallen and to yourself.

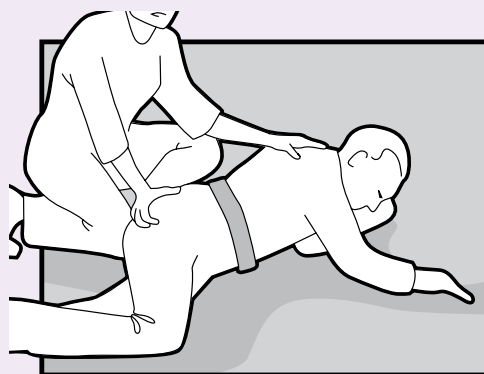
Do not hurry, and let them rest as often as they need to. If they get stuck at any time, make them comfortable and call the ambulance.

1. Do NOT try to get the person up straight away!
2. Calm the person and yourself. Get them to take deep slow breaths.
3. Check for injuries. If they are badly injured, such as with a broken bone, they need to stay where they are. Make them as comfortable as possible and call an ambulance. Keep them warm while you wait for the ambulance.

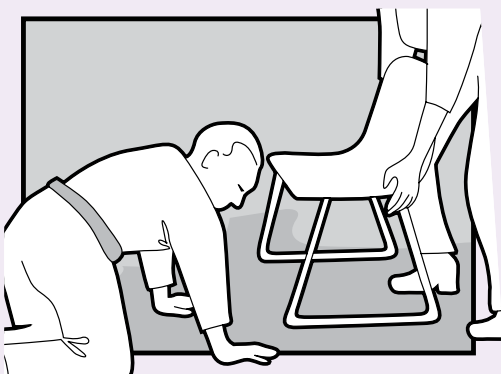
4. If they are not badly injured and feel they could get up, get two sturdy chairs and place one near the person's head and one near their feet.



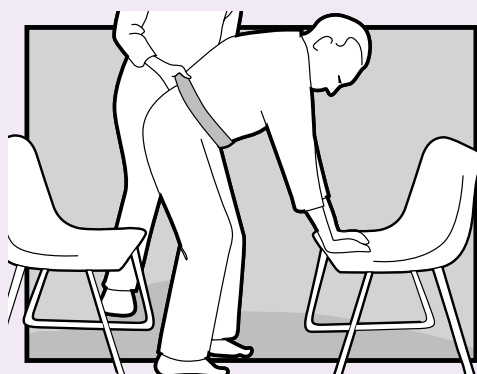
5. It is important that the fallen person does the work. The helper should only guide lightly, helping the person to roll onto their side.



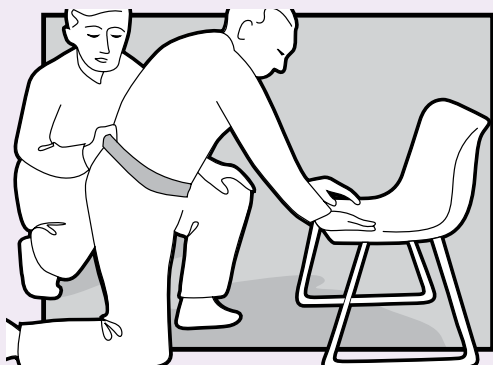
6. Help the person to kneel. If they have sore knees, place a towel underneath as cushioning.



8. Ask the person to lean on the seat of the chair and bring one leg forward and put that foot on the floor.



7. Place one chair in front of the kneeling person.



9. Place the second chair behind the person. Ask them to push up with their arms and legs and then sit back in the chair behind them. Guide them up and back into the seat, remembering not to lift them – they should be doing the work. Keep your back upright.

Let the person's doctor know that they have had a fall.

Falls Prevention – Home exercises

The following balance and strength exercises are easy to do at home. Make sure you have a chair, bench top or wall nearby for support when you try them. Once you become more confident, you can hold for longer, or increase the number of repetitions. Use smooth movements when performing these exercises and take your time.

1. Heel-to-toe standing/walking:

Helps keep balance when you have to walk through a narrow space

- With fingertips on something solid to help balance, stand heel-to-toe, bend your knees slightly and keep still for ten seconds
- Vary the exercise by walking slowly, placing your heel to touch the toe of the other foot.



2. Knee raises:

Helps with climbing stairs and getting in and out of cars and buses

- With fingertips on something solid to help balance, lift a knee to hip level and hold it for five seconds
- Repeat with the other leg
- Then repeat 8 times.



3. Side leg raise/sideways walking:

Improves stability when you have to take weight on one leg and helps you step sideways to avoid tripping

- With fingertips on something solid to help balance, stand on one leg and raise the other sideways, holding it for five seconds
- Repeat eight times
- Repeat with the other leg
- Extend to walking sideways, with slow steps alongside a bench or table.



Falls Prevention – Home exercises

4. Heel raise:

Helps with walking and climbing stairs

- With fingertips on something solid to help balance, lift both heels off the floor and stand on your toes for three seconds, then slowly lower your heels to the floor
- Repeat five times.



5. Stepping up a step:

Improves stability on steps, paths and uneven surfaces

- Holding onto a rail, go up and down a single step
- Repeat five times.



6. Sit to stand:

Helps with getting up and down from a chair or toilet and in and out of the car

- Stand up slowly from a chair, keeping your knees slightly apart. To make it harder, cross your arms in front of your chest or hold them out in front of you at shoulder height
- Then lower yourself back down into the chair
- Repeat 5 times



- If this is too strong for your knees, start by using a chair with armrests.

Acknowledgement to:

Staying Active and on Your Feet booklet
2010 www.activeandhealthy.nsw.gov.au

For further information scan this with your smart phone

Email: falls@cec.health.nsw.gov.au
Web: www.cec.health.nsw.gov.au



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“Falls Prevention – Home exercises” sourced from NSW Falls Prevention Program and Clinical Excellence Commission.

For more information on how you can prevent falls, please read the Australian Government’s Department of Health’s publication : “Don’t fall for it. Falls can be prevented! A guide to preventing falls for older people”, available online at: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/phd-pub-injury-dontfall-cnt.htm>

To receive this publication in an accessible format phone (03) 9096 8770, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email AACServdev@dhhs.vic.gov.au

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

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Printed by Gunn + Taylor, Glen Waverley (1712004)