

STEPPING STONES TO FALLS PREVENTION



Step steady... step safe

A graphic of seven smooth, light-brown stones arranged in a descending staircase pattern from top-left to bottom-right.

STEPPING STONES TO FALLS PREVENTION

Older people have a right to expect the highest possible quality of life. Sadly a lot of older people trip, slip or fall and falling can badly damage a person's quality of life.

Falls are not necessarily a natural consequence of ageing and many can be prevented through simple lifestyle changes.

A fall is often the trigger to make you look at your life and take the opportunity to improve your health and fitness and stop yourself falling again.

This folder aims to give you the information to help you do this, and to show you where you can get help in the Bridgend County Borough Council area if you need it.

It is a good idea to fill in the self assessment 'Am I at risk of falls?' in this folder as a starting point.

Useful Websites

Bridgend County Borough Council

www.bridgend.gov.uk

NHS Direct Wales

www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

Provides useful links to a directory of local services / activities via your postcode

HPC - Health Professions Council

www.hpc-uk.org

A register of Health Professionals eg: Chiropractors, Podiatrists, Physiotherapists etc.

CONTENTS



Am I at risk of Falls? Quick quiz.

Making your home safer

I have had a fall

Medication, alcohol and the risk of falls

Dealing with anxiety about falling

What is osteoporosis?

Looking after yourself

Strength and balance exercises for healthy ageing

Eyesight, hearing and balance

Looking after your feet

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AM I AT RISK OF FALLS?

QUICK QUIZ

Name:

Address:

.....Age:.....

	RISKS	Tick yes or no for each of the statements below	YES	NO
1	Medical problems	I take sedatives, sleeping pills, fluid tablets, blood pressure pills/ 4 or more medications/I am dizzy/unsteady or fall at times		
2	Balance, strength	I have wobbly feet, weak legs, am unsteady, have difficulty turning, climbing stairs or getting up from a chair		
3	Fear of falling	I am scared I will fall/I avoid activities in case I fall/ I am not as active now		
4	Staying active	I walk less than 3 times a week for at least 15 minutes/I find exercise difficult due to arthritis, heart or other problems/I have been inactive for a long time		
5	Vision	My vision is blurred/double or I have difficulty seeing steps, walking in dim or glare/bright light/I have not had an eye test in the last 12 months		
6	Feet and footwear	My shoes have slippery soles, narrow or high heels, are worn/old, have no fasteners, are too big/small/I wear 'slippers'/I have painful feet		
7	Nutrition	I have had recent weight loss/poor appetite/I have osteoporosis/ have difficulty getting shopping/I eat less than 3 servings of dairy products a day		
8	Managing at home	I have difficulty with some day to day tasks, washing, dressing, getting to the toilet/I feel unsafe gardening, walking/I have hazards around the home		
9	Hazards at home	My home is poorly lit, has uneven surfaces, obstacles or other hazards that requires me to take extra care.		
10	What if I do fall?	I don't have a plan if I fall/I don't know how to get up/I am not confident that I would know what to do if I fell		

If you have answered yes to any of the questions refer to the relevant information in this folder. You might find it useful to show this completed quiz to your GP

Making your home safer....

You can make small changes in your home and cut down on accidents. You could:

- Fit a letterbox cage to save bending down
- Put 20w energy efficient light bulbs in the kitchen and stairways so that they are brightly lit
- Use long life bulbs so you do not have to change them so often
- Paint the outer edge of steps with non slip white paint
- Use non slip mats/strips under rugs, in the kitchen, on stair landings and inside/next to the bath
- Have handrails by the toilet and bath and on the stairs, contact Bridgend County Care and Repair for advice: 01656 646755
- Make carpets safer by repairing or removing any frayed edges
- Take the castors off any furniture that you use to lean on and hold on to.
- Make sure there are no wires or other clutter on stairs or places where you walk
- See if you can get someone else to change curtains or light bulbs for you
- Store things you use a lot in places you can get to easily
- Spread salty sand on wet or icy steps
- Mop up any spills at once
- If you are going to use steps to reach something, make sure they are non-slip with safety chain and handrail

Other things to think about....

- More telephone extensions around the home will stop you rushing to answer the phone. Cordless ones are particularly useful as you can leave the handsets in convenient places. An answer machine might be even better
- A personal alarm system can be a comfort to you and your family. Find out more about these systems by contacting Bridgelinek/Telecare: 01656 642279
- Try to keep your home warm. Cold muscles work less well and may lead to accidents and injuries
- If you have a pet, fit a brightly coloured collar, so that you can see it more easily and are less likely to trip over it.

Step steady... step safe

Making your home safer...

Most falls occur at home. Stay safe and independent in your home by following these simple suggestions.

Keep your path clear

- Move books, boxes, shoes and clutter out of your path and off the stairs
- Move extension, appliance and telephone cords that you can trip over
- If you have pets, watch where they are sleeping or lying down
- Rearrange furniture to allow a clear path. If the furniture is heavy, ask for help to move it

Don't give your feet a reason to trip

- Put away those loose mats and rugs
- Apply double sided tape to the back of the carpet to keep it from moving
- Take your time when getting to the phone or to answer the door. Rushing may cause you to trip and fall
- When walking up and down stairs, take your time and use the handrail. If you don't have a handrail contact Bridgend Care and Repair: 01656 646755 for advice

Brighten up your home

- Turn the light on as you move through your home and up and down the stairs
- Use nightlights to brighten bedrooms, halls and bathrooms
- Have a lamp or torch and your glasses within easy reach of your bed

Keep your bathroom fall free

- Use a non-slip mat in the bath or shower
- Use a bath board or shower stool
- Install a grab rail by the toilet and in the bath and shower. Don't use the towel rail or sink to get up you might pull it off the wall. Contact Bridgend Care and Repair for advice on how to get grab rails installed

Cut down the risks in your daily life

- Getting out of bed, or getting up from a chair you have been sitting in for a long time, can be a problem. If you stand up too quickly, your blood pressure can drop suddenly. This can make you light-headed. Try to stand up in slow stages. When you get up from a chair, try to tense your arms and legs a few times first
- When you go to the toilet at night,
put the light on

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I have had a fall



Illustration by Berkshire Health Promotion Resources

Step steady... step safe

If you have a fall, try to....



Get help

Try not to panic if you have had a fall. Don't move if you feel pain or know that you have hurt yourself. Try to attract attention. Bang on the wall or floor to get your neighbour's attention, use your personal alarm system if you have one. Phone the emergency services or a neighbour friend or relative.

Get up

A lot of older people have problems after they fall, even when they have not hurt themselves. This is because they lie on the ground for a long time after falling - and this 'long lie' can lead to hypothermia and pneumonia. If you cannot get anyone to help you, try to use the furniture to help yourself up. Crawl to a sturdy chair. Use the chair for support, and get up from your knees. Sit on the chair for a while before you stand up.

Keep warm

If you cannot get up on your own you need to keep warm, tense your leg and arm muscles regularly and find a coat, jacket, tablecloth or anything else to use as a blanket.

After a fall

You should tell your doctor about any fall. You should certainly tell them if you were unable to get up off the floor on your own.

Getting more help

Tell your doctor about any falls that you have. He or she will be able to tell you how the problem can be treated.

Local council, Care and Repair schemes and Age Connect will give you advice in private on:-

- **How to prevent falls**
- **What your welfare rights are**
- **What benefits you are allowed**

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Medication, alcohol and the risk of Falls

Medicines could contribute to a fall if:

- You are taking more than 4 types of medicines
- You have started taking a new medicine within the previous 2 weeks
- You take a lot of medicine

Problems associated with some medicines:

- Drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Poor judgement
- Low blood pressure
- Disturbance of vision
- Confusion

These medicines might make a fall more likely:

Those which lower blood pressure e.g.

Water tablets
Anti-depressants
Blood pressure tablets

Those which can cause confusion e.g.

some heart tablets
steroids
some anti-inflammatory tablets
anti-histamines
mental health tablets
sleeping tablets
sedatives

If you have any concerns about your medication, do not stop taking the medication, but ask your GP for a medication review

- Alcohol in older people takes a longer time to be processed by the body
- The side effects of alcohol may last longer e.g. unsteadiness these may contribute to the risk of falls
- Be aware that mixing alcohol with some medication may make you dizzy and increase your risk of falling
- Consider whether falls you have had are related to when you have had a drink

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Dealing with anxiety about falling

We all stumble or trip at some point. But fear of falling can start to become a serious worry – and quite difficult to deal with if not addressed quickly. This anxiety may stem from having had a fall already, but it can prey on your mind even if you haven't fallen before. This sometimes happens after a period of illness, which can leave you feeling weak and perhaps a bit unsure of yourself. Consequently you may become more cautious, limit what you are willing to do and lose confidence in carrying out daily tasks and activities. You may even stop wanting to go out on your own. Worrying in this way is not unusual and can make you anxious, isolated or depressed.

Fears about losing your independence can also make you reluctant to seek help. Will people think you're frail or can't look after yourself properly? Will they suggest that you consider moving to a care home? It's important not to let such thoughts stop you from taking positive steps to get help.

The purpose of falls prevention is to enable you to live as independent and enjoyable a life as possible. This is the case whether you have had a fall already, or are intent on preventing one. Talk to your GP. With the help of your GP or local falls service, you can work out how to regain your balance and strength, reduce your risk of falling and get your confidence back.

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What is osteoporosis?



Our bones contain collagen (protein), calcium salts and other minerals. Each bone is made up of a thick outer shell known as cortical bone and a strong inner mesh of trabecular bone which looks like a honeycomb, with blood and bone marrow between the struts of bone.

Osteoporosis occurs when the struts that make up this structure become thin causing bones to become fragile and break easily.

Osteoporosis literally means 'porous bones' and is commonly linked to post menopausal women. However men, younger women, children and pregnant women can also be affected.

Consequences of osteoporosis

Osteoporosis causes bones to break following a minor bump or fall. These broken bones, commonly referred to as fragility fractures, are most common in the wrist, hip and spine, although other parts of the body can also be affected.

Compressed bones in the back (spinal fractures) can lead to the loss of height and spinal curvature, while a broken hip often results in both loss of independence and confidence.

Having osteoporosis does not automatically mean that your bone will break: it means that you have a 'greater risk of fracture'. Thin, fragile bones in themselves are not painful but the broken bones that can result may cause pain and lead to other problems.

However, effective drug treatments, physiotherapy and practical support can reduce the risk of further fractures and speed recovery.

Want to know more?

Contact the National Osteoporosis Society
Free Osteoporosis helpline – **0808 800 0035**
www.nos.org.uk

Or contact the Osteoporosis Nurse at the Princess of Wales Hospital on **01656 754009** and leave your name and telephone number.

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Looking after yourself



Keep your body active

You are more likely to fall if you have weak muscles and poor balance. A good way to make your muscles stronger and to improve your balance is to take regular exercise.

Some good forms of physical exercise are:

- Walking
- Light gardening and housework
- Keep-fit classes
- T'ai Chi classes (but check that the teacher has worked with older people before)

Regular exercise is also good for easing the pain and swelling arthritis causes - so is massage.

Before you start

Speak to your doctor first if you are not used to taking physical exercise. Then:

- Start gently (don't overdo it)
- Build up slowly
- Don't try to do more than you feel comfortable with

Don't give up

Don't stop taking exercise just because you have had a fall - or because you are afraid of falling. If you do this, you may make it even more likely that you will fall.

Bridgend County Borough Council runs strength and balance classes as part of the National Exercise Referral Scheme, as well as other exercise classes which you might find of benefit. For more information regarding these classes, please contact **0300 012 1223** or you can visit your GP or Practice nurse for more information on the National Exercise Referral Scheme.

To find out more about activities in your area check these useful websites:-

Bridgend County Borough Council - **www.bridgend.gov.uk**
- **www.haloleisure.org.uk**

NHSDirect Wales - **www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk**,
provides useful links to a directory of local
services/activities by using your
postcode

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Strength and balance exercises for healthy ageing

As we age we don't necessarily become less able. It is a common misconception that we should slow down and take things easy, especially physically. If we stay active and continue to put our bodies through a full range of motion, we are maintaining the nutritional input to joints, muscles and nerves, which enable movement to occur. Exercise will help maintain and improve balance, and help reduce the possibility of falls.

Exercise should be comfortable and fun. Join a class for older people with a qualified instructor to get the most out of your exercises. If you are doing the exercises at home make sure that you only do the exercises that you can do safely.

Safety

- Ensure that the chair you use is sturdy and stable.
- Wear comfortable clothes and supportive footwear.
- Prepare a space and have your exercise band ready before you start.
- Exercise bands can be purchased from sports stores. In the meantime you can use tea-towels or tights instead.
- Before you start exercising, it is recommended that you speak to your doctor. While exercising, if you experience chest pain, dizziness or severe shortness of breath, stop immediately and contact your GP.
- If you experience pain in your joints or muscles, stop, check your position and try again. If the pain persists seek medical advice.
- And remember: where there is pain and strain – there is no gain.
- Warm Up

If you feel you need more specific guidance or have an injury or problem which requires Physiotherapy please contact:

Physio Direct, (a telephone triage service) at Princess of Wales Hospital, this will put you in touch with a Chartered Physiotherapist based at Princess of Wales hospital.

Lines open from 9am to 10am Monday to Friday (except Bank Holidays): Tel - 01656 752898

Physiotherapy Walk in Assessment Clinic based in the Physiotherapy Department at the Princess of Wales Hospital. Opening times from 8.30am to 10am Monday to Friday (except Bank Holidays) no appointment necessary.

Step steady... step safe

1. Warm-up exercises



Always begin with a warm-up to prepare your body for the main exercises.

There are eight warm-up exercises in this section.

Complete all of the following

1 Chair march

- Sit tall
- Hold the sides of the chair
- Alternately lift your feet and place them down with control
- Build to a rhythm that is comfortable for you
- Continue for 30 seconds



2 Arm swings

- Sit tall away from the chair back
- Place your feet flat on the floor below your knees
- Bend your elbows and swing your arms from the shoulder
- Build to a rhythm that is comfortable for you
- Continue for 30 seconds



3 Shoulder circles

- Sit tall with your arms at your sides
- Lift both shoulders up to your ears, draw them back, then press them down
- Repeat slowly 10 times



4 Ankle loosener

- Sit tall away from the chair back
- Hold the sides of the chair
- Place the heel of one foot on the floor, then lift it and put the toes down on the same spot
- Repeat 10 times on each leg



5 Spine twists

- Sit tall with your feet flat on the floor
- Place your right hand on your left knee and your left hand behind you on the chair back or side of the chair
- Sit very tall, then, with control, turn your upper body and head towards your left arm
- Repeat on the opposite side
- Repeat 10 times



6 Chest stretch

- Sit tall away from the chair back
- Reach behind with both arms and hold the chair back
- Press your chest forwards and upwards until you feel the stretch across your chest
- Hold for 10 seconds



7 Back of thigh stretch

- Move your bottom to the front of the chair
- Place your right foot flat on the floor, then straighten your left leg out in front with your heel on the floor
- Place both hands on the right thigh, then sit tall
- Lean forwards and upwards until you feel the stretch in the back of your left thigh
- Hold for 10 seconds
- Repeat on your other leg



8 Calf stretch

- Stand behind the chair holding the chair back
- Step back with one leg checking that both feet are pointing forward
- Now press the heel of the back foot into the floor until you feel the stretch in your calf
- Hold for 10 seconds
- Repeat on your other leg



Step steady... step safe

2. Bone and muscle strengthening exercises

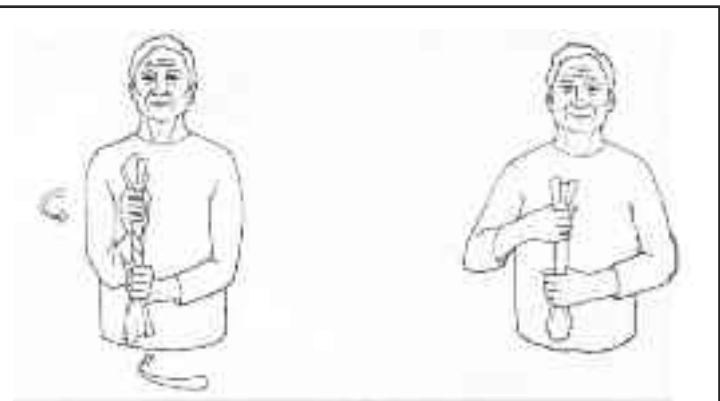
There are five exercises in this section. Start by choosing three each time you exercise

Try to select different exercises each time so that you have done them all by the end of the week.

Progress by building up gradually until you can complete all the exercises in one go. Aim to do them three times a week.

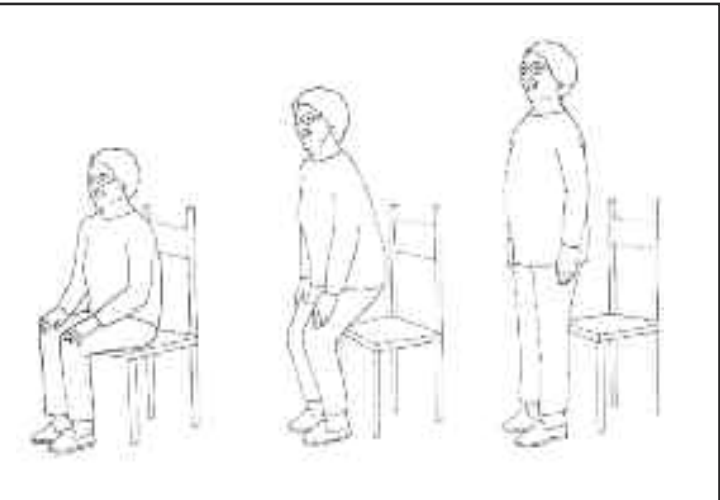
1 Wrist strengthener

- Fold or roll the band (or towel/tights)
- Holding it with both hands, squeeze hard, then twist by bringing your elbows close to your body
- Hold for a slow count of 5 (and count out loud to ensure you don't hold your breath)
- Repeat 10 times



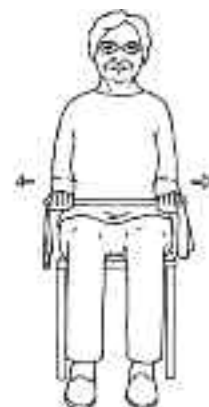
2 Sit to stand

- Sit tall near the front of the chair
- Place your feet slightly behind your knees
- Lean slightly forwards
- Stand up (using your hands on the chair for support if needed. Progress to no hands over time)
- Step back until your legs touch the chair, then stand tall, bend your knees and slowly lower your bottom back into the chair
- Repeat 10 times



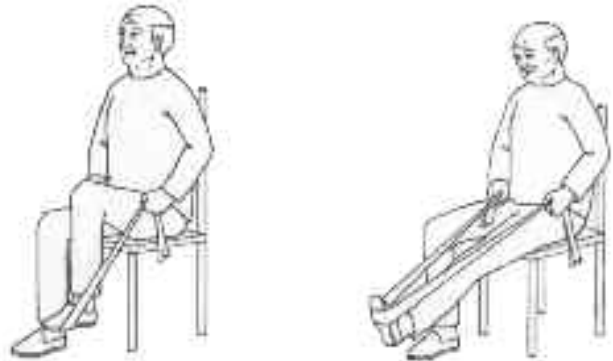
3 Upper back strengthener

- Hold the band with your palms facing up and wrists firm and straight
- Pull your hands apart, then draw the band towards your hips, squeeze your shoulder blades together
- Hold for a slow count of 5 (and count out loud to keep breathing)
- Then release
- Repeat 10 times



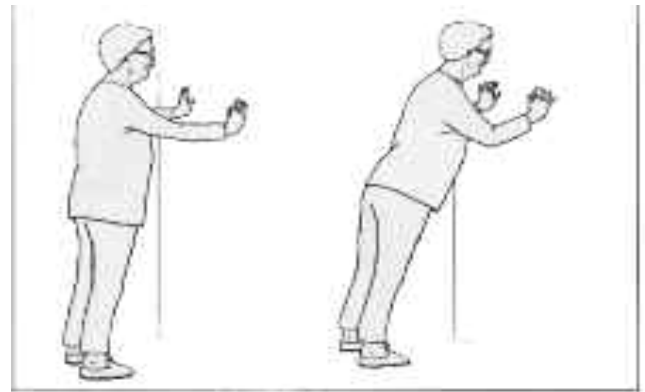
4 Thigh strengthener

- Place the band under the ball of one foot
- Sit tall, lift the knee a few inches, then pull your hands towards your hips and hold
- Now straighten your knee by pushing your foot firmly downwards against the band
- Hold for a slow count of 5 (count out loud to keep breathing)
- Bend the knee and release the arms
- Repeat 10 times then change legs!



5 Wall press-up

- Stand at arms length from wall
- Place your hands on the wall at chest height, fingers upwards
- Keeping your back straight and tummy tight, bend your elbows lowering your body with control towards the wall
- Press back to the start position
- Repeat 10 times



Ending the session

Finish by chair marching at a relaxed pace for 1–2 minutes, then repeat the last three stretches from the warm-up:

- Chest stretch
- Back of thigh stretch
- Calf stretch

Well done! You have completed your exercises for today.

Try to exercise again in 2–3 days.

Step steady... step safe

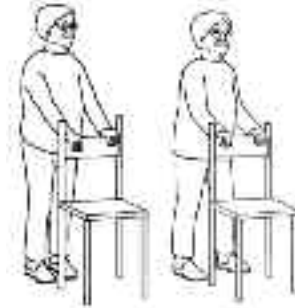
3. Balance exercises



There are five exercises to help improve your balance

1 Side steps

- Stand tall holding the chair
- Take a step from side to side
- When confident try holding the chair with only one hand
- Continue for 30 seconds
- Now try 2 steps to the side and back for 30 seconds



2 Heel raises

- Stand tall holding a sturdy table, chair or even the sink!
- Raise your heels taking your weight over the big toe and second toe
- Hold for a second
- Lower your heels to the floor with control
- Repeat 10 times



3 Toe raises

- Stand tall holding a sturdy table, chair or even the sink!
- Raise your toes taking your weight back onto your heels and without sticking your bottom out
- Hold for a second
- Lower your toes to the floor with control
- Repeat 10 times



Step steady... step safe

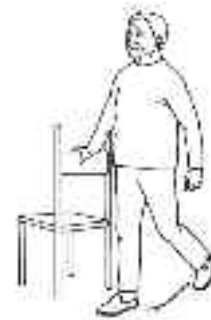
4 Marching

- Stand to the side of the chair holding on with one hand
- Stand tall
- March on the spot swinging your free arm
- Keep marching for 30 seconds
- Turn slowly around then repeat using the other arm
- Repeat 3 times



5 Leg swings

- Stand to the side of the chair holding on with one hand
- Stand tall
- Swing the leg furthest away from the chair forwards and back with control
- Perform 10 swings
- Turn slowly to repeat on your other leg



Ending the session

Finish by chair marching at a relaxed pace for 1–2 minutes, then repeat the last three stretches from the warm-up:

- Chest stretch
- Back of thigh stretch
- Calf stretch

Well done! You have completed your exercises for today.

Try to exercise again in 2–3 days.

Step steady... step safe

Eyesight, Hearing & Balance

Vision and hearing play a vital role in balance and movement.

If you need glasses for reading and distance, it may be best to have two separate pairs. Glasses fitted with bifocal or varifocal lenses can make objects and surfaces appear closer than they really are and so cause you to trip or lose your balance, particularly on stairs. If you have had problems with these glasses or are considering them, ask your optician for advice.

It's very important to have your eyes checked and your glasses prescription reviewed at least every two years, or every year if you're over 70. NHS eye tests are free once you reach the age of 60. If you receive certain benefits or are on a low income, you may also be entitled to help with the cost of new glasses through the NHS Low Income Scheme. In Wales health is organised through local health boards and information may be available by calling NHS Direct on 0845 4647.

The incidence of hearing loss increases as you get older but people often wait several years before raising hearing problems with their GP. Your GP can discuss your hearing difficulties with you and if necessary, arrange for an appointment to be made at either the Audiology or ENT department at your local hospital. Following assessment and if necessary, a NHS digital hearing aid can be prescribed in one or both ears.

Check when your next sight test is due. If hearing problems are affecting your day-to-day or social life, make an appointment to see your GP.

Combined sight and hearing problems

Hearing loss and balance problems can often occur together in some individuals and this can be even harder to manage if you have sight problems that can't be corrected by wearing glasses. Your local authority will have a Visual Impairment/Sensory Team who can offer help and support if you have sight loss, hearing loss or both. Following an assessment, their specialist staff will explain the help available to make daily tasks easier. They can also offer mobility training, including advice on moving around at home and outdoors, and how to keep as fit and active as you can.

Contact your local social services department, (Customer Services team - 01656 643643) to explain how your vision or hearing difficulties or both are affecting your daily life and ask for an assessment.

Step steady... step safe

Maintaining Balance



There are three systems involved in helping us to maintain good balance.

1 Visual System

Our eyes give us a clear image of our surroundings and where we are in relation to them.

2 Proprioceptive System

The sensors in our joints muscles and feet. This system can be compromised if you have any problems such as arthritis or any conditions which cause loss of feeling and sensation in lower limbs and feet. This often causes falls in elderly patients.

3 Vestibular System

The balance organs found within the inner ear, which are responsible for detecting head movement in different directions.

A weakness in any of these systems will lead to a balance problem of some degree. Recovery and treatment varies in type, depending which system or systems are affected and to what extent.

Management or treatment of balance problems may include a simple prescription from your GP. However, your GP may request a referral to the hospital for further opinion, investigation or treatment. Such assessment will be undertaken by specialists including ENT consultants, Audiologists or Physiotherapists.

Step steady... step safe

Looking after your feet



Looking after your feet is important, as certain problems such as bunions, long nails or corns can affect your balance and stop you getting out and about. Always report any problems with your feet to your GP, practice nurse or Podiatrist

Well - fitting shoes are important too. High-sided shoes with low heels and thin soles with a good grip can help if you feel unsteady. If you have arthritis, you may find that trainers or similar, well-cushioned shoes are more comfortable and offer welcome support. But if the soles are too thick, you may not be able to feel contact with the floor as well and this could make you feel a little unsteady. So ask your GP or Podiatrist/Chiropodist for advice.

These footwear tips can help you feel more confident on your feet:

- Don't wear slippers without backs or that are loose and worn out.
- Avoid sandals and shoes with high heels.
- Make sure your trousers or skirts don't trail on the ground.
- Avoid walking on slippery floors in socks or tights.

Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board (ABMU) can give you advice from their 'Podiatry Access for New Patients service'

Direct access telephone service: **0300 300 0024**

Open Mon-Fri 08.50 - 4.30 (except Bank Holidays)
Leave a message if no answer

Or

Walk in Clinic at Port Talbot Resource Centre - Open Mon-Fri 8.45-11.30 and 1.10-3.30
(except Bank Holidays)

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Useful Local Contacts List

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Customer Service Centre: 01656 643643

To get advice on Bridgend County Borough Council Services, including Adult Social Care, Equipment and other Disability Services

HEALTH SERVICES

Princess of Wales Hospital	01656 752752
Maesteg Hospital	01656 754247
Neath/Port Talbot Hospital	01639 862000
Physio Direct (ABMU Trust)	01656 752898
Podiatry Direct (ABMU Trust)	01639 683054
NHS Direct Wales	0845 46 47

VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Alzheimer's Society, Bridgend and District	01656 651490
Stroke Association	01656 863418
Age Concern Morgannwg - Bridgend	01656 669288
Arthritis Care - Bridgend	01656 739732
Bridge VIS - Bridgend Visual Impairment Society	01656 766240

SOUTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Free Home Fire Safety Check Freephone 800 1691234

HOME IMPROVEMENTS AND ADAPTATIONS

Bridgend County Care and Repair 01656 648417

COMMUNITY ALARMS

Bridgelink - Telecare 01656 642279

PARKING BADGES

Blue Badge Scheme (Disabled Parking) 01656 815381

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Bridgend County Care & Repair
www.careandrepair.org.uk



GIG
CYMRU
NHS
WALES | Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Abertawe Bro Morgannwg
University Health Board



1000 LIVES 
O FYWYDAU