

Stay Upright Stay Strong

Tips and hints to reduce your risk of slips, trips and falls in daily life

Baw Baw and Latrobe



Contents

- 4 Acknowledgements
- 5 How serious are falls
- 6 Balance, strength and falls
- 8 Fear of falling
- 10 Keeping active
- 12 Medication effects on the body
- 14 Vision
- 16 Feet and footwear
- 18 Nutrition and healthy bones
- 20 General health problems
- 22 Home safety checklist
- 24 Hazards in the community
- 26 Reducing injuries from falls
- 28 Great gifts and bright ideas
- 29 What to do if you fall
- 30 Physical activity programs for older people
- 31 Useful contacts

Acknowledgments

This booklet, previously titled 'Upright & Independent in Gippsland', was updated and re-designed in March 2022 as part of the Central West Gippsland Primary Care Partnership (CWGPCP) Falls Prevention Resource Project.

The Resource Review Group were:

- Richard Adams, Physiotherapist, Community Allied Health Team, West Gippsland Healthcare Group.
- Erin Di Corleto, Occupational Therapist, Latrobe Community Health Service.
- Christian Pitzner, Improving Care Program Lead, Governance Unit, Latrobe Regional Hospital.
- Pat Lovelock, Project Coordinator, Central West Gippsland Primary Care Partnership.

Special thanks to:

- Professor Keith Hill, Director, Rehabilitation, Ageing and Independent Living (RAIL) Research Centre, School of Primary and Allied Health Care, Peninsula Campus, Monash University.
- Latrobe Regional Hospital Community Advisory Committee.
- West Gippsland Healthcare Group Community Voices Committee.

Funded by the Victorian Government.



How serious are falls?

About one in three people over the age of 65 years will fall each year.

Falls cause the majority of injuries to older people. Falls can result in broken bones or fractures. They are often the reason people are admitted to hospital or move to a hostel or nursing home.

The most common place for falls to occur is in and around a person's own home.

Although the risk factors increase as we get older, ageing itself is not a cause of falls. 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 Healthcare Professionals, such as your Doctor, Physiotherapist, Occupational Therapist or Fitness Leader.



Balance, strength and falls

- Do you have weak legs, pain or stiffness in your 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 slip or 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 Healthcare 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 around, take several smaller steps, do not turn suddenly.
- Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists can provide exercise programs and equipment to improve balance, strength and walking. Appointments can be arranged through your Doctor, Health Services or privately in some areas. Equipment may include walking aids, shower chairs or rails in your home. These aids should always be fitted and used correctly.
- Your Doctor can refer you to a Physiotherapist, Occupational Therapist or Community Rehabilitation Centre to provide the necessary assistance with a team approach.
- You can also find out about available aged care and health services by contacting My Aged Care on 1800 200 422 or going to their website at www.myagedcare.gov.au

Actions planned

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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 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 normal daily activities, which in turn reduces muscle tone and strength.

If you ticked any of the above, you should seek assistance from your Doctor or Physiotherapist.



Suggestions and contacts

- If you are afraid of falling, think about how it is affecting your daily activities and mobility.
- If you live alone, a mobile phone, cordless telephone or personal alarm can give you greater confidence to keep moving in and around the house.
- Personal alarms can be used to seek help by sending an alert to a relative, neighbour or monitoring service if you fall, simply by pressing a button. They are usually worn as pendants around the neck or as bracelets.
- Personal alarms can be purchased privately. Some people may be eligible for a free personal alarm through the Victorian Government's Personal Alert Victoria (PAV) Program. For information about PAV, contact My Aged Care on 1800 200 422 or your local Council Customer Service Centre:



Latrobe City Council: 1300 367 700

Baw Baw Shire Council: 1300 229 229

- New technology such as some smart watches (e.g. Apple Watches) and hearing aids can also detect falls. They can be used to contact emergency services, by pressing a button or automatically if you don't move for a time.
- An Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist can assist with strategies to return to your 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 your environment safer.

Actions planned

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Keeping active

- Do you sit for long periods of time?
- 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, muscles and balance. It also helps you to control your weight and your mental wellbeing.



Suggestions and contacts

- A range of exercise programs aimed at, or suitable for, people of all ages are available in your local community (see page 30).
- Walking groups, gentle exercise groups, Tai Chi, water exercises, dancing and strength and balance exercises may be helpful. Doing several different types of activities or exercise gets the best results.
- People with medical conditions should get a medical clearance from their Doctor before beginning an exercise program and should join a supervised program run by a Physiotherapist or Fitness Leader.
- A range of health services and community groups in Latrobe City and Baw Baw Shire run a variety of modified exercise and strength training programs for older people. Contact numbers are at the back of this booklet. Some fitness centres also run groups for older people, as do some Neighbourhood Houses and Senior Citizens Centres.
- For more information about exercise programs, you can also contact:



COTA Victoria (Council On The Ageing): 1300 13 50 90

Arthritis Australia: 1800 011 041 or visit www.arthritisaustralia.com.au

Musculoskeletal Australia: 1800 263 265 or visit www.msk.org.au

- Your Doctor or Physiotherapist can advise you on individual exercise programs, for example at a Community Rehabilitation Centre or Health Service if specialised exercise is needed.

Actions planned

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Medication effects on the body

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

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you should discuss them with your Doctor or other Health Professional.



Suggestions and contacts

- Ask your Doctor or Pharmacist for information about your medications and whether any of them will cause unsteadiness or other side effects. Pharmacists can also suggest ways to better manage your medications.
- Always know why you are taking medications and what side effects they have. Keep a chart, including instructions. Use a Dosage Counter Pack, available from your Pharmacy.
- Speak to your Doctor or Pharmacist if you think a medication may be causing side effects, such as being unsteady, shaky, dizzy, confused or drowsy. Ask about a Home Medication Review.
- Avoid taking medication and alcohol together. Alcohol can add to the risk of falling. It can affect your alertness, judgement, physical co-ordination and reaction time.
- Never take medications prescribed for other people.
- The District Nursing Service or your Pharmacy can assist with medication if you are having difficulties with self-management.

Actions planned

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Vision

- Has it been more than 12 months since you had your eyes tested?
- 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?
- 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 and contacts

- 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 bifocals outdoors if possible. When walking outdoors, it is safer to use distance glasses if you have them.
- Make sure you turn a light on if you need to get up overnight or when it is dark. Automatic sensor lights and touch lamps beside your bed can assist at night.
- Keep your glasses handy at all times. Use a glasses chain or cord.
- Seek information and advice from Vision Australia about managing low vision while maintaining independence. Phone Vision Australia on 1300 84 74 66.
- See an Occupational Therapist for advice on correcting any safety or tripping hazards around your home, e.g. painting the edges of steps to make them more visible.

Actions planned

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Feet and footwear

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

Even if a shoe or slipper looks all right, if it doesn't fit or the sole is worn it is dangerous. Feet problems or pain caused by diabetes, ingrown toenails, fallen arches or misshapen toes can contribute to falls. Investing money in good shoes and slippers is inexpensive compared to the costs from injury and loss of independence.



Features of good footwear

- ✓ Fastened with laces, velcro or buckles; holds foot more firmly improving fit
- ✓ Correct length, should not be too long / loose or too short / tight
- ✓ Wide and deep toe-box for comfort and stability
- ✓ Broad low heels with a rounded edge
- ✓ Soles with a clean, non-slip surface
- ✓ Firm supportive heel cup



Suggestions and contacts

- Avoid scuffs, thongs and slippers. Do not wear your socks without your shoes. Choose footwear that is enclosed front and back.
- Keep the soles of your shoes clean. They can become sticky or very slippery from dirt, grease and dust.
- 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 suitable shoes, as can good shoe shops.

Actions planned

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Nutrition and healthy bones

- Have you recently lost weight?
- 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 to keep up your calcium reserves as you get older. This will help you maintain strong bones. For people who are low in vitamin D, recent research has found that vitamin D with calcium can help prevent bone thinning and osteoporosis. Talk to your Doctor for more information about calcium and vitamin D supplements.



Suggestions and contacts

- Eat at least 3 serves a day of calcium rich foods e.g. milk, cheese, yoghurt, salmon bones, green leafy vegetables.
- 20 minutes of sunlight twice a week is recommended for adequate vitamin D, at times when UV levels are low (mornings and mid-late afternoon). Avoid the middle of the day.
- If you have reduced appetite or unexplained weight loss, tell your Doctor. You may benefit from advice by a Dietitian and/or calcium supplements.
- If you need support with shopping or meals, contact My Aged Care on 1800 200 422 or go to their website at www.myagedcare.gov.au
- If you have Osteoporosis, speak to your Doctor about difficulties and contact your local Health Service for an Osteoporosis Support Program. You can also contact Healthy Bones Australia for further information on 1800 24 21 41 or visit their website at www.osteoporosis.org.au
- Speech Pathology can assist with swallowing difficulties. Appointments can be arranged through most Health Services.

Actions planned

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

General health problems

There are many health conditions that contribute to falls, for example:

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

You should have regular check-ups with your Doctor. This will help prevent worsening of any health conditions you have and keep you as active as possible. Short-term illnesses such as diarrhoea, urinary tract and chest infections can also increase the risk of falling. If you feel unwell, it is important to seek medical treatment and take extra care to avoid falls.

It is a good idea to ask family, friends, neighbours or local services to assist with shopping, cooking and personal care if you are unwell.



The following all create serious risks for falls, especially at night:

- **Incontinence** (loss of bladder or bowel control).
- **Frequency** (going to the toilet often).
- **Urgency** (going in a rush).
- **Nocturia** (getting up to the toilet more than twice a night).

Discuss these things with your Doctor. Some medicines can affect continence.

A full review of your medications might be helpful.

Suggestions and contacts

- Home Support may be able to assist. Contact My Aged Care on 1800 200 422 or go to their website at www.myagedcare.gov.au
- You can seek help from a Continence Advisor. They can give you advice on bladder and bowel conditions, how to improve control, how to manage your condition and continence aids.
- Continence advice and treatment can be arranged through your local community health service or healthcare group. You can also ring the National Continence Helpline on 1800 33 00 66.
- Continence aids are available from supermarkets and pharmacies.

Actions planned

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Home safety checklist

The majority of falls occur within the home. Slips occur where floor surfaces may be slippery such as the bathroom and kitchen. Trips and falls can occur anywhere throughout the house including the lounge and bedrooms. 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?
- Do you have difficulty with showering, dressing or using the toilet?
- Are your floors ever wet or slippery?
- Do you have poorly lit areas in your house?
- Do you have difficulty getting out of your chair?
- Do you have difficulty getting out of your bed?
- 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 or steps in disrepair?
- Do you feel unsafe gardening, walking around the house or on uneven ground?
- Are there steps or stairs in or around your home without handrails?

Suggestions and contacts

- Remove unsecured floor coverings and safely fix extension cords and garden hoses.
- Contact an Occupational Therapist through your local Health Service to advise you about what could help to make life easier and safer for you.
- Contact My Aged Care on 1800 200 422 or go to their website at www.myagedcare.gov.au 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.
- The Gippsland 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 Doctor or call My Aged Care on 1800 200 422 for further information.

Hazards in the community

Many falls in the community happen to active, healthy older people as well as people 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 problems.



Suggestions and contacts

- Always try to use footpaths. 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. You can call Customer Services on:



Latrobe City Council: 1300 367 700

Baw Baw Shire Council: 1300 229 229

- Watch out for bicycles, toys, pets, or other objects that may be in the way.
- Allow yourself time to cross roads safely, use pedestrian crossings if available.
- Avoid sun glare (see page 15).
- If you use public transport, take your time. Keep one hand free to hold a rail and always take care on the steps. Ask the bus driver to wait until you are seated before moving off.
- If you are travelling by car, take care getting in and out. Check that the area is safe, flat and even before getting out.
- When entering or leaving a building, stop briefly until your vision adjusts to the light changes.

Reducing Injuries from Falls (Injury Prevention)

Taking steps to reduce the risk of falling is the first course of action recommended. Falls may still occur for some people, even after addressing falls risk factors.

Actions can be taken to reduce the risk of injuries from falls. These include maintaining or increasing bone strength and reducing the risk of fractures through:

- **Exercises using weights** or resistance.
- **Sunlight exposure** - outside of peak times.
- **Vitamin D supplementation** for those who are Vitamin D deficient.



For people who fall often, products are available which can reduce the impact of falls and prevent or reduce injury. These include:



- **Hip protectors.** These are underwear or pants with special padding. They can reduce impact and injury on the hips & backside (coccyx). These work only if they are worn when at risk of falling. So, to be of value, a person needs to commit to wearing them regularly, whenever up and about or at risk of falling. Older adults are at risk of breaking their hip when they fall. Hip protectors can reduce this risk if worn regularly.



- **Track pants** which have hip, backside (coccyx) and knee protector pads sewn in for protection in three areas.



- **Soft head protectors / helmets.** These can reduce impact and head injury. Head injuries or brain injuries can be serious and they can reduce someone's independence and function.

- **Knee pads.** For people prone to tripping, these can reduce impact on the knees.

These products are only effective in reducing impact and the chance of injury to the area of the body protected by the equipment. Protective equipment is only suggested for people at high risk of falling.

For more information on any of the above, please contact your Health Professional.

Great gifts and bright ideas

When relatives or friends ask for a gift suggestion, suggest one of the following items.

They could greatly increase your safety and wellbeing. For example:

- **Touch lamps** for beside the bed at night.
- **New shoes** or slippers that are safe.
- A **mobile phone or cordless phone** that can be kept beside you so you don't have to rush to answer it when it rings.
- A **smart watch** (e.g. Apple Watch) or hearing aid that can detect if you have fallen. They can be used to contact emergency services, either by you pressing a button or automatically if you don't move for a time.
- A **personal alarm** that you can use to get help if you fall, by sending an alert to a relative, friend, neighbour or monitoring service. These are usually worn as a pendant around your neck or as a bracelet / wrist band.
- **Sensor lights** for night time, both inside and outside the house.
- **Sunglasses and sun hats** to reduce glare when you are outside.
- A **magnifying glass** to read the telephone book and medication bottles.
- A **non-slip bath mat** to reduce the risk of slipping on the wet bathroom floor.
- A **glasses cord or chain** to hang your glasses around your neck so you always have them handy.
- A **torch** for the bedside or a phone with a torch App in case of power failures or for outside.
- A **long-handled pick-up stick** to make it easier to pick up items off the floor.

What to do if you fall

Stay quiet for a few moments

Make a decision,

Will I try to get up?

If you can get up

- Roll onto one side, then onto all fours.
- Crawl to a stable piece of furniture.
- Use stable furniture to pull yourself up and sit.
- Take time to recover.
- Phone someone and tell them you have had a fall.

If you can't get up

- Use your personal alarm if you have one.
- Use your mobile or portable phone if it's handy.
- Call for help or make a loud noise to attract attention.
- If it is dark and you can reach a light or lamp, turn it on and off to attract attention.
- Try sliding or crawling to reach the telephone or front door.
- Make yourself comfortable and try to find something to keep warm, try to relax.
- Try a little later to get up.
- Lay quietly until help arrives.

A telephone on a wall or bench is of no use if you fall; keep it on a low table.

A mobile phone or 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 older people

Please telephone for details and locations.

A range of physical activity programs aimed at, or suitable for, older people are on offer in Baw Baw Shire and Latrobe City. These programs are provided through organisations such as Community Houses, Neighbourhood Houses, Senior Citizens Centres, West Gippsland Healthcare Group, Latrobe Community Health Service, the Department of Veterans' Affairs and University of the Third Age (U3A). Other venues include Leisure Centres and Health and Fitness clubs.

Activities include Tai Chi for balance and for arthritis, walking groups, bowls, table tennis, yoga, pilates and other exercise classes including water exercises.

Some local exercise program contacts include:

In Latrobe City:

Latrobe Community Health Service.....	1800 24 26 96
Latrobe City Council.....	1300 367 700
or visit the Council website – www.latrobe.vic.gov.au	
Traralgon Neighbourhood Learning House.....	5174 6199
Morwell Neighbourhood House.....	5134 5488
Churchill Neighbourhood Centre.....	5120 3850
Moe Neighbourhood House.....	5126 3123
Senior Citizens Centres (Moe, Morwell, Newborough, Traralgon):	
Contact Latrobe City Council.....	1300 367 700

In Baw Baw Shire:

West Gippsland Healthcare Group, Allied & Community Health.....	5624 3548
Baw Baw Shire Council.....	1300 229 229 or 5624 2411
or visit the Council website – www.bawbawshire.vic.gov.au	
Warragul Community House.....	5623 6032
Senior Citizens Clubs (Drouin, Tarago/Neerim South, Trafalgar, Warragul, Willow Grove):	
Contact Baw Baw Shire Council.....	1300 229 229 or 5624 2411

Useful Contacts

Local contacts for Baw Baw Shire and Latrobe City:

West Gippsland Healthcare Group, Allied and Community Health.....	5624 3548
Baw Baw Shire Council.....	1300 229 229 or 5624 2411
Latrobe Regional Hospital Falls and Balance Clinic.....	5173 8383
Latrobe City Council.....	1300 367 700
Latrobe Community Health Service.....	1800 242 696
Gippsland Aged Care Assessment Service (ACAS).....	1800 242 696
Dementia Access and Support Workers.....	1800 242 696
Dementia Nurse Practitioner.....	1800 242 696
Cognitive Dementia Memory Service (CDAMS) at the Latrobe Regional Hospital Specialist Clinic.....	5173 8822
Heart Foundation Walking (for local walking group contacts).....	13 11 12

or visit their website - <https://walking.heartfoundation.org.au/walking/victoria>

Other Contacts:

My Aged Care.....	1800 200 422
Vision Australia.....	1300 84 74 66
COTA Victoria (Council On The Ageing).....	1300 13 50 90
Arthritis Australia Infoline.....	1800 01 10 41
Musculoskeletal Australia Help Line.....	1800 26 32 65
Healthy Bones Australia Helpline.....	1800 24 21 41
National Continence Helpline.....	1800 33 00 66
Dementia Australia Helpline.....	1800 100 500

Other falls prevention resources are available from the Ageing and Aged Care section of the Victorian Department of Health website at: <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/wellbeing-and-participation/falls-prevention>