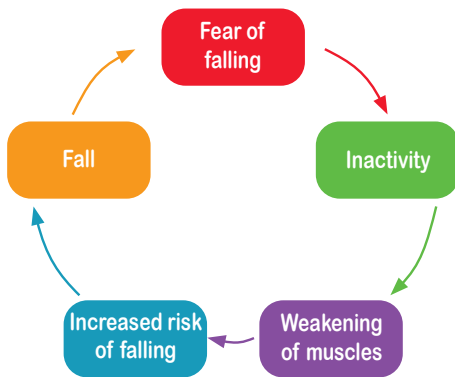


Anxiety related to falls

Anxiety following a fall, or the fear of having a fall, is very common. This information aims to help you understand what can be done to minimise any anxiety you may feel.

Fear of falling can create a vicious cycle that stops you from doing activities that you are able to do.

Fear can stop you from living your life with confidence.



Fear of falling can lower your quality of life. You stop doing activities you enjoy, going out with friends, and being active. Fear of falling has been shown to actually increase your risk of falls by reducing the activity levels, stiffing joints and weakening the muscles which in turn increases a postural sway.

This information helps you to recognise if you are experiencing anxiety relating to falls and gives some ideas about what you can do to help.

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Anxiety can be mild or severe, short term or prolonged over time and can actually increase the risk of having a fall:

Signs and symptoms of anxiety:

Physical; stomach upsets, headaches, irregular breathing, rapid heartbeat/palpitations, sweating, muscle tension, shaky legs, weight loss, fatigued.

Mental/emotional; over thinking, trouble concentrating, insomnia, memory issues.

Behavioural; avoidance, needing reassurance, irritable, panic attacks, restless, social withdrawal, tearful, changed eating pattern, drinking/smoking, lowered confidence.

Create an action plan

Create an action plan of what you will do if you fall. This will give you confidence that you will know what to do. The quicker you can get help after a fall, the less likely you are to experience unnecessary fear, distress, and complications like pressure sores and dehydration.

- Go from room to room and decide what changes you can do yourself and what changes you need extra help with. If you need help to check each room, ask a friend, relative or neighbour to have a look with you.
- Decide how you are going to call for help and who to nominate to contact.
- Decide how will that person or emergency services gain entry.

Stay active

Stay active and participate in activities that promote muscle strength and balance, such as using light weights or resistance bands. Being active also has a positive effect on how we feel. When we exercise, the brain releases feel good chemicals which are known to improve our mood and reduce anxiety and tension.

Remember, some fear is healthy; it helps us to be careful. Too much fear prevents us from living the life we want to live.

Setting goals

Anxiety after a fall can make you more cautious, and stop you doing things you enjoy.

Set yourself small achievable targets – such as walking for a short distance first (even if it is several steps in the safety of your own home) – and build on this.

If you feel you would benefit from a walking aid, discuss this with a physiotherapist or occupational therapist. Achieving small goals will help you to start feeling more confident again.

Talking about it

If you've had a fall, try not to dwell on it even though it's understandable that you may feel worried for a short time afterwards. Talking to someone about your anxiety can help to make problems seem more manageable. Recognising there's a problem can be the first step to getting the help you need and your life back.

Confidence building and learning new coping strategies

Start with small achievable goals and gradually make them more challenging. Helps master feelings of panic if you've already practised.

Positive thinking

Look for successes, celebrate achievements. Negative thoughts can prevent you from overcoming anxiety. Learning to challenge these with ones that are more balanced can help reduce worries. It just takes practice. Think about how you have solved problems in the past and if a similar approach would help now.

Look after yourself

Be kind to yourself – make time for things you enjoy, think about your diet, sleep, and hydration. Avoid stimulants that exaggerate the mood including alcohol, cigarettes.

Getting help

Get professional help if needed; speak to your GP who can direct you to some of above support e.g. someone to talk to, the falls programme.

Medication can sometimes help with symptoms e.g. sleeping tablets. Medications can be used on a short term basis to help break the anxiety cycle.

Relaxation techniques

- Breathing exercises – bring breathing back under control
- Physically relaxing the body
- Listening to music or guided imagery
- Meditation – yoga
- Mindfulness

If you need help to understand this leaflet or would like it in a different language or format such as large print, Braille or audio, please ask our staff or email:

Llrct.services@nhs.net

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