

Advice on gait (walking)

An unsteady gait has many potential causes that range from temporary to long term. An unsteady gait can increase your risk for falls and injury, this information aims to help you understand what can be done to correct your technique and reduce the risk of a fall.

Walking with the right technique and good posture can help keep your bones and joints aligned properly and help to:

- decrease wear and tear on your joints, muscles, and ligaments
- prevent back, hip, neck, and leg pain
- reduce muscle aches and fatigue
- reduce the risk of injuries
- improve your balance and stability

To fully understand how to walk correctly, it helps to focus on each part of the body, from head to toe.

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Keep your head up

When you're walking, focus on standing tall with your chin parallel to the ground. Imagine your head being pulled up gently by an invisible piece of string that's attached to the ceiling. This may help prevent you from dropping your head into your chest while you walk.

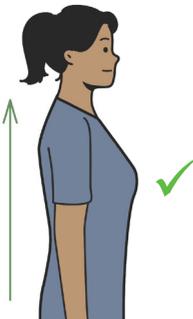
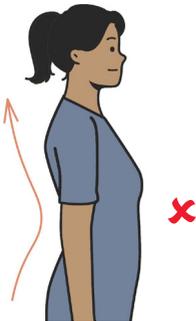


Good posture really is crucial for being able to walk correctly

To help correct your standing posture, imagine a string attached to the top of your head pulling you upwards.

The idea is to keep your body in alignment, maintaining the spine's natural curvature, with your neck straight and shoulders parallel with the hips:

- keep your shoulders back and relaxed
- pull in your abdomen
- keep your feet about hip distance apart
- balance your weight evenly on both feet
- try not to tilt your head forward, backwards or sideways



Poor posture can be caused by numerous health conditions such as arthritis, respiratory diseases and neurological conditions. Poor posture can also be related to muscle weakness, pain, a sedentary lifestyle and poor core stability.

Eventually poor posture can lead to difficulties with balance and therefore the need for additional support to reduce the risk of falls.

Swing your arms



As you walk, gently swing your arms back and forth at your sides. Make sure you swing your arms from your shoulders, not from your elbows.

- Don't swing your arms across your body.
- Don't swing your arms up too high. Keep them around your midsection, not around your chest.

Swinging the arms helps with balance and gait stability as well as being energy efficient.

Weight transfer

The ability to safely move your weight from one side of the body to the other.

It is crucial for safe walking as the weight needs to move over to one side to allow the leg on the opposite side to move forward.



Stride length

Place your foot past the toe of the opposite foot; try not to take small shuffling steps. Your stride length should be comfortable for you.

Taking small steps increases the risk of falls and has been associated with reduced ability to undertake activities of daily living.

Base of support

The feet provide a base of support for the body and having a good solid base goes a long way to helping us maintain a good alignment.

Having a hip width base of support allows you to feel balanced. The closer your legs are together, the narrower your base of support is and the harder it is to remain balanced.



Step from heel to toe

Maintain a steady heel-to-toe gait. This involves striking the ground with your heel first, then rolling through your heel to your toe, and pushing out of the step with your toe. Avoid flat-footed steps or striking the ground with your toes first.

Heel strike/toe off allows for toe clearance, reducing the risk of trips, slips and falls.

Turning

Ensure you pick your feet up when turning and do not swivel on one foot. Being mindful of turning is important, if you pivot or turn with a narrow stance you will increase the risk of a fall.

Walking aids

Can provide several benefits to users, including more independence, reduced pain, and increased confidence and self-esteem. There are a range of mobility devices available to meet people's needs.

Further Information

The following link is to a video produced by Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) Falls Prevention Group.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4PR9GedBrZY>

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

Our service was involved.

The video includes a demonstration of exercises, gait and how to get up off the floor after a fall.

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