

## REMEMBER:

- Exercise can help to improve muscle strength, increase joint flexibility and improve your balance.
- The use of a walking aid may also help maintain your balance and improve your safety. Make sure the rubber stoppers on your frame/walking stick are not worn down and that the walking aid is the correct height for you.

### Contact details



### Tri-borough Falls Prevention Service

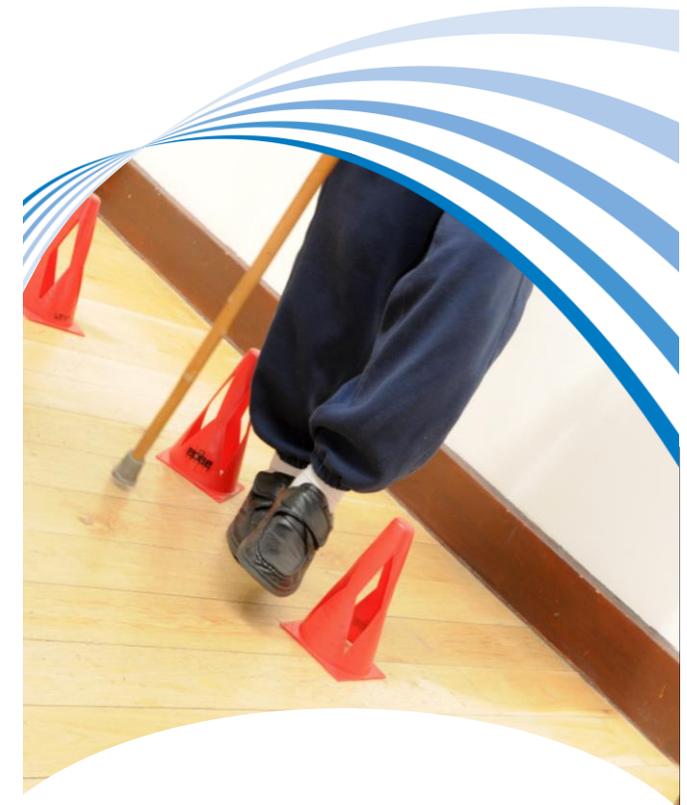
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London, W10 6DZ  
Tel: 020 8102 5494

[www.clch.nhs.uk](http://www.clch.nhs.uk)

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any concerns or need advice about accessing NHS services, you can speak confidentially to the PALS team on 0800 368 0412 or email [clchpals@nhs.net](mailto:clchpals@nhs.net)

## Balance & walking



A guide on how an active lifestyle  
can help prevent falls

**Falls Prevention Service**

**The ability to maintain balance is essential for carrying out everyday life activities, including walking, bending down to put on shoes, getting in and out of a chair.**

### **What is balance?**

There are many different meanings for the term balance. Often when we speak about balance we mean the ability to move without falling over.

To maintain balance, your centre of gravity must stay within your base of support, (if you are standing up then this is the area between your two feet). The wider the base of support the easier it is to maintain balance.

The ability to maintain balance relies on several important systems:

- Sensory system – detects information about where the body is relative to the surroundings, and includes your sense of touch, vision and inner ear motion sensors.
- Brain – processes the information
- Muscles & joints – carry out the necessary movements to maintain balance, as directed by the brain. We require strength, flexibility and endurance to maintain balance and prevent falls.

### **What causes balance and walking problems?**

Balance disorders may be caused when any of the above systems do not work correctly. As you get older the likelihood of balance problems increases, as your body is exposed to different disease processes and injuries over time.

Furthermore, the natural ageing process causes our bodies to react more slowly to changes in body position and surroundings, meaning that we are slower to correct our balance.

Some examples of factors that can affect balance and walking:

- Poor eye sight
- Joint stiffness
- Inner ear infection
- Muscle weakness
- Poor posture
- Some medications
- Alcohol
- Neurological diseases / injuries e.g. Stroke, Parkinson's Disease

### **Walking aids**

A mobility aid could help you if you have problems getting about.

- It is important that your walking stick is the correct length. It should be level with the wrist crease when your arm is held by your side.
- A walking stick should have a rubber end called a 'ferrule', which prevents it from slipping. Ferrules wear out quickly so they need to be checked regularly. You can buy replacements from large chemists or you can obtain them from your therapist.
- Walking frames give more support than a walking stick, are more stable, and help increase confidence. Rollators are wheeled frames which are easier to manoeuvre and do not break up the pattern of walking. They are good for people with moderate balance problems.

