

Build Activity Into Your Everyday Life

Falls & Frailty

Ageing, a loss of mobility, a lack of confidence on your feet, poor balance and co-ordination, and possibly underlying osteoporosis all increase the body's frailty and bring a very real fear of falls and fractures.

A conundrum however, exists for many people (both men and women) in this 'category' – the fear of falling stops you from being physically active, and this can lead to a loss of confidence and independence. By limiting your level of physical activity, your muscles waste (you lose muscle bulk) and become weak, joints stiffen and lose support from weak surrounding muscles, and lack of use results in loss of balance and motor control (your brain's ability to communicate quickly with your legs and feet). This compounds the problem and actually increases your risk of falling and sustaining an injury such as a fracture.

However, the more physically active you are, the better you can protect your body from falls and fractures. Being active strengthens your bones and muscles, making you stronger, and less susceptible to fractures. Strong muscles and stable joints give you more control when moving around which means better balance, co-ordination and reaction time.

Studies have shown that people of an older age who exercise regularly had a 21% reduced risk of falling. Performing specific balance exercises and doing more than 3 hours of physical activity a week reduced fracture risk (from falls) by 40% and the frequency of falls by up to 49%.

If you need more proof of how being physically active can help you, here are a few:

- 1 **Reduced** number of falls and risk of falls
- 2 **Improved ability** to perform activities of daily living
- 3 **Reduced risk** of sustaining an injury when falling
- 4 **Reduced severity** and progression of frailty
- 5 **Faster walking speed** due to improved nerve supply to the muscles and better communication between the brain and muscles of your legs and feet.
- 6 **Increased muscle strength.** Inactivity results in muscles wasting (losing their bulk or mass) and becoming weak. The more you use your muscles the stronger they become, giving your joints more support and better function. Stronger muscles also work more efficiently and demand less oxygen, making an activity or chore seem easier over time as you get stronger.
- 7 **Improved balance.** The more you physically do, the better the communication between the nerves in your brain, down to your feet. The better and faster they talk to each other, the safer you are – nerves are essential in maintaining balance, co-ordination and reaction time - all things that will help prevent a fall. The less you do, the more the 'doors of communication shut' between your muscles and nerves in your brain and legs.
- 8 **Improved cardiovascular and respiratory function.** This will result in you feeling less breathless and you'll be able to do more with less effort. Reducing your feeling of fatigue will result in greater ability and self-belief to do more.
- 9 **Improved fitness** and energy levels and reducing the feeling of exhaustion will result in better quality of life as you are able to do more with less effort.
- 10 **Greater confidence, independence and motivation.**

