

# The prevention of patient slips, trips and falls and the safe use of bed side rails

## Information for patients, carers and relatives

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust is committed to the prevention of patient slips, trips and falls whilst providing safe, excellent care. This leaflet is intended to provide information about how you and the staff caring for you can work together to reduce your risk of slips, trips and falls during your stay in hospital and on your return home.

The causes of patient slips, trips and falls are complex but illnesses or conditions that affect balance or mobility, e.g. Parkinson's disease or stroke, and anaesthesia for surgery or painkillers can contribute. The risk of slips, trips and falls can also be affected by environmental factors, medication, footwear, and the age, eyesight and mobility of the person.

Some patients are at particular risk of falling out of bed. Bed side rails on hospital beds may be used to reduce the risk of patients rolling, sliding or falling out of bed; they are never used to stop patients from getting out of bed. This leaflet explains the safe use of bed side rails in hospital and their potential benefits and risks.

### Why do we want to reduce the risk of slips, trips and falls?

Slips, trips and falls can:

- result in loss of confidence and self-esteem
- result in cuts, bruises, broken bones or other injuries
- lead to a longer hospital stay

As a patient you should be fully informed of, and involved in, any decisions about your care. Don't worry about asking questions if you are unsure about any aspect of your care.

---

## **Our hospitals have introduced measures for reducing slips, trips and falls and improving patient safety:**

- Our staff will listen to your concerns, taking action when necessary, and will answer any questions you may have
- Our wards are regularly monitored and hazards identified and dealt with quickly and efficiently
- All wards have chairs of different heights, adjustable beds and access to equipment and therapy staff trained to help with patient mobility
- Our staffing levels are regularly reviewed to ensure the highest standards of patient safety
- All our clinical staff are trained in the completion of falls risk assessments
- Our staff follow strict guidelines in the correct use of bed side rails
- Our staff follow strict guidelines to ensure fast action and treatment when slips, trips, and falls do occur
- A group has been set up to monitor the number of patient slips, trips and falls in our hospitals, identify trends and causes, and make changes in care delivery to reduce them

## **If you are admitted to hospital we ask that you bring, or arrange for someone to bring in:**

- day and nightwear that is not too big or too long
- footwear that is lightweight, has a non-slip sole and fits well
- any walking aids that you normally use
- any dentures, spectacles and hearing aids that you normally use so that you and our staff can communicate with each other effectively when you are moving around

Please also bring into hospital any medications that you normally take at home; the hospital doctors will check these as some medications can affect your movement and balance.

---

---

## As a patient you can help us reduce the risk of slips, trips and falls during your hospital stay:

- **Ask for help:** tell the nurses when you feel anxious about moving around.
- **Use your call bell:** to ask for assistance to move around the ward if you need it.
- **Be careful:** when standing up or getting out of bed.
- **Think safety:** do not use the hospital furniture to help you stand up or move around.
- **Wear appropriate clothing and footwear:** wear lightweight shoes or well fitting slippers when moving around.
- **Walking aid:** use your walking aid when moving around.
- **Take your time:** take your time when moving around.
- **Take advice:** listen to the advice given to you by the therapy teams and nurses.
- **Hearing aid/spectacles:** wear your hearing aid and/or spectacles if you need them. Ask a nurse to clean them or check them if they are not working properly.
- **Food and drink:** try to eat and drink regularly.
- **Be aware:** inform staff if you notice any hazards such as a wet floor or trailing wire.
- **Be tidy:** keep your bed area free of clutter if you can.
- **Rest when you are tired.**

### We recommend that you don't:

- walk around in anti-embolism stockings, socks or tights without wearing shoes or slippers.
- try to get out of bed or on and off the commode if you feel unsafe to do so or feel dizzy.
- worry about asking for help.

Please remember, the hospital environment is not as familiar to you as your own home. The nurses are there to help and are never too busy to keep you safe.

---

---

## Bed side rails: Who decides when to use them?

Following careful assessment by a trained health professional, bed side rails may be used to reduce the risk to some patients from rolling, sliding or falling out of bed. Following explanation of the benefits and risks associated with bed side rails, patients who are able to can make the decision whether bed side rails are used.

If a patient is too ill to decide for themselves, the nurse responsible for their care will decide if bed side rails are in the patient's best interests.

If possible, staff will discuss the use of bed side rails with the patient's relatives or carers. However, relatives or carers cannot take a decision for the patient unless the patient is a minor and they are the parent or guardian. Bed side rails are only used if the benefits are greater than the risks to the patient.

## Bed side rails: Deciding whether to use them

Some decisions about bed side rails are simple:

- Patients who are confused enough and mobile enough to climb over the bed side rails will **not** be given bed side rails
- Patients who want to get out of bed without help from staff will **not** be given bed side rails

Decisions on the use of bed side rails are based on the risks and benefits for the patient as an individual.

## How likely is it that the patient will fall out of bed?

Patients at a higher risk of falling from bed include:

- Patients who have fallen from bed before
  - Patients who are drowsy or semi-conscious
  - Patients who are blind or have poor eyesight
  - Patients on special mattresses (e.g. air filled)
  - Patients with seizures or spasms
  - Patients in electric beds they can operate themselves
-

---

## How likely is it that the patient will be injured if they fall out of bed?

Most patients who fall out of bed receive only small bumps and bruises, but for some patients injury is more likely and may be more serious. Some patients may feel anxious without bed side rails, even if their risk of falling from the bed is low.

### Bed side rails: the benefits

- Can reduce anxiety
- Can prevent cuts, bruises, broken bones or other injuries resulting from a fall from bed

### Bed side rails: the risks

- **Bed side rails may stop the patient from being independent**
- **Some patients may try to climb over the bed side rails**  
Very confused patients with enough strength and mobility to climb out of bed are most at risk. Bed side rails are not used for these patients.
- **Bed side rails may cause the patient distress**  
Most patients are positive or neutral about bed side rails, but some patients feel trapped by them which can cause distress. Bed side rails are not used for these patients.
- **Some patients may injure themselves on the bed side rails**  
If patients are very restless in bed they can knock themselves on a bed side rail, or get their limbs stuck between the bars. Even when correctly fitted, bed side rails carry a very rare risk of postural asphyxiation (restriction on the ability to breathe normally, caused by being trapped in the bed side rails).

In our hospitals the use of bed side rails is assessed and appropriate actions taken by trained health professionals to reduce the small risk of patients getting trapped between the bed and the bed side rail.

---

---

## Alternatives to bed side rails

There are other ways to reduce the risks associated with falls from bed, for example, in some cases it may be more appropriate to use an Ultra Low Bed.

If you have any questions regarding the use or absence of bed side rails please ask one of the ward staff.

## Reducing the risks of falling at home

On returning home you, your relatives and friends can continue to reduce your risk of falling by following the advice below. Please note, not all the advice will apply to everyone; individual assessment can be made by an occupational therapist if required.

### Environment

- Make sure that stairs and steps are kept clear of clutter
  - Keep floors clear of trailing electric leads and cables
  - Secure loose rugs and runners with slip resistant tape
  - Fit handrails to stairs
  - Using a higher chair with armrests can make standing up and sitting down easier
  - Rearrange furniture to reduce the chances of bumping into things
  - Avoid standing on chairs to change light bulbs etc; ask someone else to do it for you or use a stepladder that is safe
  - Have handrails fitted around your toilet, bath and/or shower
  - Apply non-slip mats to showers and baths
  - Wipe up any spills immediately
  - Keep a torch next to your bed to use when reaching for the light switch
  - Make sure spectacles are within easy reach
  - Take time to get up out of bed; sit on the edge for a minute or so before standing up
-

- 
- Allow time for your eyes to adjust to changes in light
  - Install extra lights if necessary
  - Put in extra telephone handsets so they are always within easy reach
  - Install security lighting in entrances, stairs and outside areas
  - Consider a 24 hour personal alarm (if you have a care manager, they will be able to provide details)
  - Keep the garden free of hazards e.g. tools left on the ground
  - Keep paths free from moss and leaves to prevent slipping
  - Paint the front of steps a contrasting colour to make them more visible
  - If using a stepladder ensure it is sturdy with non-slip feet and placed on a level surface when in use

## **Medication**

- Have a check-up at least once a year with your GP
- Contact your GP if you feel faint or unsteady after taking your medication
- If you experience any dizziness, report it to your GP
- Consider a dossett box for your medications
- Have a flu jab every winter if you are eligible
- Have an annual blood pressure check by your GP

**Eyesight** - Vision plays an important role in your sense of balance and movement

- Have your eyesight checked regularly, every six months or as recommended by your optician
  - Eye tests are free if you are aged 60 or over
  - Always keep spectacles within easy reach
  - Keep your spectacles clean and smear free
-

---

## **Exercise**

Many people who are afraid of falling limit their activities in the hope this will reduce the risk. However, this may lead to muscle weakening and instability on movement so can actually increase your risk of falling.

One of the best ways to reduce the risk of falling is to stay fit, healthy and mobile:

- Walking, gardening and dancing are just some of the ways to keep fit and healthy
- Strength and balance exercises improve your co-ordination and the muscles in your legs
- Speak to your GP before starting any form of exercise

## **Footwear**

- DO NOT wear slippers that are loose and worn-out or do not have backs to them
- Slippers should have non-slip soles and flat broad heels
- Shoes should have flat heels, non-slip soles and fit properly
- Avoid walking on slippery floors in socks and tights without shoes or slippers
- Make sure that your clothing does not trail on the ground
- Foot problems have an effect on balance, mobility and stability; if you suffer with foot problems have regular check-ups with a chiropodist
- Your GP or chiropodist can advise you on footwear

Even if you think a fall is just 'one of those things' there may be steps you can take to reduce the risk of it happening. Your GP will be able to provide you with further advice or can refer you to appropriate agencies.

---



---

## What you should do if you fall at home – DON'T PANIC!!

Stay quiet for a moment and assess the situation.

Can you get up? If **yes**:

- Roll onto your hands and knees and crawl to a sturdy piece of furniture, e.g. a bed or chair, then stand up carefully.
- Tell someone you have had a fall.
- Seek medical advice.

Can you get up? If **no**:

- Try sliding or crawling to seek help, e.g. to the front door, telephone or personal alarm. Make a loud noise or shout.
- If you have fallen on a hard floor try to crawl to a softer carpeted area if possible.
- Keep warm; cover yourself with anything within reach.
- Keep moving to prevent pressure sores and stiffness and to maintain circulation.

**Please use this space to write any notes or questions you would like to ask.**

---

---

## Further information and advice can be obtained from:

### **District Nurse**

Contact via your GP Surgery  
Provide advice, information and practical support and can refer you to Rapid Response.

### **Rapid Response**

Provide nursing services between 6.00pm and 6.00am. Can provide help at home to avoid necessary admission into hospital, support on discharge from hospital, and personal care / intensive therapy for a short period of time.

### **Care Agencies**

Supply a range of services including shopping, cleaning, meals, help with getting up, washing, dressing and toilet needs. These can be part of a 'Package of Care' arranged by Social Services or can be purchased directly from the agencies themselves.

A **Lifeline** is an alarm you carry with you at all times; if you fall and are unable to get help the alarm can be activated. It is linked to a 24 hour helpline who can contact a relative or services to come and help you.

For more information telephone:  01622 212742

### **Help the Aged Handy Van Scheme Kent**

Provide a range of safety and security items for those that are elderly, on low incomes and own their own home.

Telephone:  01255 473999

### **Brighter Futures for Older People**

Helps older people keep well and independent in their own homes. Provide regular telephone or personal contact for advice, information, accompanying you on shopping trips and outings.

Telephone:  01622 762403


---

---


## **Maidstone Borough Council**

Can arrange for your wheelie bins to be put out for you if you are unable to do so yourself.

Telephone: Maidstone

 01622 602162

Malling & Tonbridge

 01732 876147

## **Maidstone Trusted Trades Register**

A register of local trades' people who provide maintenance services in the area.

 01622 685276

## **V Team**

Provide practical DIY and one-off gardening services to the elderly, disabled, those on low income and those recovering from an illness.

 01622 677337


## **Age Concern**

Do you need help to have a bath? Age Concern can help people in their own homes to have a bath.

 01622 753618

Please note that these services are not endorsed by Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust and there may be a charge for some services provided. Check out all details before committing.

**NHS 111**

 111

**NHS Choices online**

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

---

---

**MTW NHS Trust is committed to making its patient information accessible in a range of languages and formats. If you need this leaflet in another language or format please ask one of your clinical care team or the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). We will do our best to arrange this.**

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust welcomes all forms of feedback from our service users. If the standard of service you have received from the Trust does not meet your expectations, we want to hear from you. Please speak with the ward manager or the nurse in charge in the first instance, or you can contact the **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** on:

**Telephone:** ☎ 01622 224960 or ☎ 01892 632953

**Email:** [mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net](mailto:mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net)

**or visit their office** at either Maidstone or Tunbridge Wells Hospital between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

You can be confident that your care will not be affected by highlighting any areas of concern or making a complaint. The Trust will retain a record of your contact, which is held separately to any medical records. If you are acting on behalf of a patient, we may need to obtain the patient's consent in order to protect patient confidentiality. More information on PALS or making a complaint can be found on the Trust's website: [www.mtw.nhs.uk](http://www.mtw.nhs.uk) or pick up a leaflet from main reception.

Issue date: July 2018  
Database reference: RWF-OPLF-PPS67

Review date: July 2021  
© MTW NHS Trust

Disclaimer: Printed copies of this document may not be the most recent version.  
The master copy is held on Q-Pulse Document Management System  
This copy – REV4.0

---