

## Talk to others

- Develop a support network. Confide in someone. Family and good friends are people who listen to you and encourage you.
- Understand your emotional responses and feelings. Don't be afraid to say what you feel.

## A simple breathing exercise

Place both of your hands with the middle fingertips lightly touching on your stomach just under your rib cage. Relax your shoulders.

Take a deep breath filling the bottom of your lungs and as you breathe in, notice the movement of your hands.

Did they move at all?

If you breathe from your diaphragm, your two middle fingers should no longer be touching. As you breathe out they should come together again.

Breathing diaphragmatically means we breathe in a deep slow regular and rhythmical fashion which triggers the relaxation response. Therefore it feels good and can be practised any time you want.

Use this breathing method before you get tense, or when you are in a stressful situation (such as after a fall or near miss).

Practise your deep breathing - nobody will notice, so breathe away!

## Summary

Fear of falling can stop us from enjoying life to the full. It can lead to avoidance of activities which results in lost confidence. The symptoms of anxiety can make things worse resulting in a negative cycle. However, this cycle can be broken! If you stop avoiding activities and use the correct relaxation techniques you can start to rebuild your confidence and resume the activities you enjoy!

**“Man does not cease to play because he grows old. Man grows old because he ceases to play”**

*George Bernard Shaw*

# Fear of falling & anxiety



A guide on the effects of anxiety and how to manage fear of falling

**Falls Prevention Service**

## What is anxiety?

Anxiety is “the reaction of the body *and* mind to an expected danger, either real or imagined” such that people feel unable to cope. It is characterised by physical symptoms such as palpitations, sweating and feelings of stress.

## Anxiety and fear of falling

Anxiety and fear of falling over is very common after experiencing a fall. But an ongoing, lasting fear of falling can cause problems and stop people enjoying life to the full. It can create **worry** and lead people to stop doing their normal activities and stay indoors more. If a person restricts their activities it can lead to a loss of confidence and feelings of failure. This can result in a vicious cycle, like the one below.

**The good news is that it is possible to break this fear of falling cycle!**

## What strategies can help?

### Staying active

- Stay active and make use of supports that you have available
- Set yourself small goals to help restore confidence
- If you can, get out of the house as well as remaining active in your own home.
- Continue with your favourite hobby or take up a new one
- Getting involved with local community clubs or groups

### Positive thinking

- Think about the times you have not fallen
- Think about your progress
- Tell yourself how well you are doing
- Try to think positively (view ‘the glass as half full rather than half empty’).
- Keep your sense of humour. When a person smiles and laughs the relaxation response takes over.
- Enjoy the present.

## Look after yourself

- Eat healthily, get enough sleep and exercise regularly to help stay healthy and active
- Learn to pace yourself. Take on only what you can handle. Set limits and say “**NO**” when you need to.
- Allow time for yourself each day.

## Try relaxation exercises

- Deep breathing exercises (see below)
- Learn and use relaxation techniques. Relaxation helps to reduce muscle tension. It is a learned skill; you need to practice it over time to get better. You can try guided imagery or progressive muscle relaxation.
- Visualisation (imagining a pleasant and relaxing place or scene)
- Listening to music or reading a book
- Going for a gentle walk
- Gentle stretching
- Take part in leisure activities.

### FALLS-RELATED ANXIETY CYCLE

