

Preventing falls at home

Patient Information Leaflet

Introduction

This leaflet is about how you can reduce the risk of falling when you get home.

The risk of falling is a common problem that can often be avoided by following a few safety tips. This booklet contains safety tips, and advice on what to do if you or someone else falls.

The important thing is that preventing falls is not just about the hazards around you. It is also about what you wear on your feet, what you eat, how active you are and what steps you take to prevent falls from happening.

Hopefully, you will find this leaflet useful but if you have any concerns or questions, please contact the Dudley Falls Service on 01384 814459.

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Loss of confidence

If you have had a fall, or are worried about falling, there are some important things to remember:

- Anyone can have a fall – you are not alone.
- Falling is frightening and people do feel less confident after a fall. Do you find that you:
 - Are more careful when you are walking? You may be slower or walking less?
 - Are leaving the house less often, or not going as far?
 - Are worried about what might happen if you fall again?

Answering yes to one or all of these questions is common and may mean you have lost some confidence.

- There are lots of things that you can do to reduce your risk of falling and improve your confidence.
- This booklet is full of ideas to help increase your confidence by taking control. Keep reading to learn what you can do to help yourself.

If your concerns are affecting you a lot, speak to a member of the Dudley Falls Service on 01384 814459. They may suggest that a falls adviser or therapist visits you at home.

Therapists can work with you to assess what equipment and other help you may need. This may include equipment such as walking aids. They may suggest some exercises to build up the strength in some muscles. These things may help to reduce your risk of falling. They may also build up your confidence so that you feel less likely to fall.

Hints and tips to reduce the risk of falling

In the bathroom:

Do:

- Try to have someone in the house when you take a bath or shower. If this is not possible, you could let someone know how long you think you will be. If they do not hear from you after an agreed time, they can then check you are OK.
- Use a non-slip bath mat.
- Make sure you have everything you need such as shampoo, soap, towels, before you get into the water.

You may be eligible for help with the cost or fitting of support aids. Find out which bathroom equipment can be fitted for you, such as grab rails or seats.

Do not:

- Lock the bathroom door.
- Have the water too hot.

In the bedroom:

Do:

- Make sure your bed is the right height for you and your mattress offers comfort and support.
- Have a light by the bed that can be switched on and off easily from the bed.
- Have a torch with good batteries by the bed in case of an emergency or power cut.
- Have a telephone or charged mobile phone by your bed in case of emergencies.

If you are part of a warden or home call service, remember to have your alarm call pendant, panic button or pull cord within easy reach.

In the hall and on the stairs:

Do:

- Make sure the hall and stairs are well lit, with light switches on both levels.
- Keep the stairs and walkways clear from obstructions.
- If possible, fit handrails on both sides of the stairs.
- Fit a cage or box to the inside of your letterbox, if possible, to save you from bending down to pick post up from the floor.

Do not:

- Leave belongings and obstacles in your hall or on the stairs that you could trip over.

In the kitchen:

Do:

- Make sure work surfaces are clear and within easy reach, in case you need to put hot or heavy items down quickly.
- Keep everyday items in easy reach – avoid storing things in high or low places.
- Use steps with handle grips for support, if you do need to reach high cupboards. Do not balance on a stool or chair.
- Wipe up spills immediately as slippery floors can cause a fall.

Do not:

- Reach up to high cupboards.
- Store everyday items too high or too low.
- Balance on a stool or chair to reach up for things.

Heating:

If you have a gas fire, try to have the controls and ignition switch fitted on top of your fire. A qualified gas engineer will be able to advise you if this is possible. Your utility company (the company you get your gas from) may also be able to offer free advice.

Lighting:

Good lighting can help prevent falls.

- Keep rooms and stairways well lit.
- Use the brightest bulb available to you, to make it easier to see.
- Use long life bulbs as they can be left on longer and use less electricity.
- If you do not feel confident replacing a light bulb, ask for help. Do not put yourself at risk of falling.
- Remember that long life bulbs may take a minute or so before they reach their full brightness.

Furniture:

Think about whether your furniture is safe.

Do:

- Arrange furniture so that it is stable and cannot fall over.
- Take casters off movable chairs to make them stable.
- Make sure you can move freely around the room.

Do not:

- Lean on furniture that may move or fall over.
- Use furniture as a walking aid.

Carpets and rugs:

Make sure carpets and rugs are tacked down or removed, if it makes the room safer.

Wires and remote controls:

Make sure all electric wires, telephone, television and computer cables are tucked away so you do not trip over them.

Answering the door or telephone:

Do:

- Take your time as if the call is important, they will wait.
- You can call out to let people at the door know you have heard their knock or the doorbell.
- Think about having an intercom fitted so you can talk to the caller before going to the door.
- Use an answerphone to take your calls – you can still speak to the caller when you reach the telephone.
- Use a portable phone and keep it fully charged. Remember it may not work during a power cut.

Do not:

- Be tempted to hurry to the door or telephone.

Walking aids:

Do:

- Make sure you use walking aids that are provided for you.
- Check the rubber at the base of your walking aid and when it becomes worn down, change it.

Do not:

- Attempt to carry objects when using a walking frame. Some aids are fitted with a carrying bag for small items.

Clothing:

It is important to wear clothes that will not cause you to fall.

Do:

- Wear clothing that allows your legs and feet to move freely.

Do not:

- Wear clothing that is too long or too tight.

Footwear and foot care

As we get older, our feet often start to protest about the way we have treated them over the years so it is important to take good care of them. The following advice will help you to care for your feet and may help to reduce the risk of falling.

Footwear

It is important you feel safe and secure when you walk.

- Choose the right footwear for support.
- Ask to have your feet measured when buying new footwear. Shoes, boots and slippers should fit properly. The size and shape of your feet can alter throughout your life.
- Choose footwear that protects and supports, with non-slip soles. This will reduce the risk of slipping on some surfaces.
- Have fastenings such as laces, buckles and Velcro on your shoes. This will help to secure your feet inside your footwear.
- Make sure you can walk well by choosing shoes with soft uppers, high sides and an enclosed heel.
- Avoid footwear with thick, spongy soles.

Foot care

Good simple foot care is also important.

Do:

- Wash your feet daily in warm soapy water. Rinse and dry them with a soft towel, taking care to dry between your toes.
- Use a foot file to remove dry, hard skin and rub moisturising cream into the soles and heels of your feet.
- Trim your toe nails at least once a month. Always cut them straight across without cutting down the sides of the nail.

There is a range of inexpensive foot care products available in your local chemist. If you need advice on foot care, speak to your GP, nurse, a state-registered chiropodist or podiatrist.

Do not:

- Ignore minor foot troubles. They are unlikely to get better by themselves. If you are in any doubt, see your GP or a state-registered chiropodist or podiatrist, especially if you have diabetes.

Safe use of medicines

Some medicines can make you more likely to fall, for example, antidepressants, sleeping tablets and other sedatives. Sometimes tablets for blood pressure can make you dizzy when you stand up.

Please note:

It is important that you do not stop taking a medicine without first talking to your GP.

Do:

- Follow the instructions for taking your medicines.
- Check medicines are working and not causing you problems. Review your medication regularly with your GP or pharmacist.
- Ask your GP surgery about a medication review if you, or someone you care for, are struggling to take medicines as prescribed.
- Ask your GP surgery for a medication review, if your treatment has changed recently and you are unsure about your medicines.
- Talk to your local pharmacist if you have difficulty opening child-resistant tops. They may be able to give you ordinary screw tops or different packaging.
- Be aware of feelings of dizziness or excessive drowsiness and speak to your GP, if you are concerned.
- Know your medicines. All medicines are supplied with patient information leaflets that provide details about the possible side effects.

Do not:

- Change the amount you have been told to take or take it at a different time, without first discussing it with your GP or pharmacist.
- Share or give your medicines to anyone else. They were prescribed for you and may be harmful to other people.

Dizziness

Sometimes changing your position can cause a drop in blood pressure. The medical name of this is postural hypotension. It reduces the amount of blood going to your brain and can cause symptoms of dizziness, falls and blackouts. The fall in blood pressure can occur at any time and may happen after getting up from either lying or sitting positions.

The following measures may help prevent this:

- See your GP to ensure that there are no medical reasons for your symptoms.
- Symptoms are likely to be at their worst in the morning when blood pressure is at its lowest. Take extra care at this time, especially getting up in the morning.
- Raise the head of your bed with pillows so you are not sleeping flat. This will help to reduce the change in position when you sit up.
- Get out of bed slowly. It is often helpful to exercise your arms and legs before sitting up, and again before standing.
- If you feel dizzy, sit down or if possible, lie flat.
- Do not rush off when you stand up. Stand for a short period to make sure you do not feel dizzy. It may be a good idea to walk on the spot before moving away from the bed or chair.
- Some people have a bigger drop in blood pressure after large meals. It may be a good idea to have five or six smaller meals rather than three large ones.
- Try not to sit or stand in one position for too long particularly when it is hot. If you have to stand for long periods, try pumping your heels up and down or standing on tip-toes, if you are able, to encourage blood flow.
- Ensure you drink plenty of fluids throughout the day. One and a half to two litres are the recommended daily amounts.
- Your doctor may advise you to increase your salt intake.
- You may be prescribed high leg support tights.
- Your doctor may prescribe new medication for you or change your existing medications.

Vision and hearing loss

You can have a fall due to problems with your sight or hearing.

Vision

- Have your eyesight checked regularly. If you are aged 60 or over, your eyesight tests should be free. You may also qualify for help towards the cost of your glasses.
- Remember to wear your glasses and keep them clean and in good condition.
- Contact your optician to ask if they can visit you, if you are housebound.
- Take care on steps and stairs when you wear your glasses, especially if you have varifocal or bifocal lenses.

If you are registered blind or partially sighted, there is a range of support available from your NHS eye department, social services and a range of dedicated charities.

Hearing

- Tell your GP if you are having difficulty with your hearing. They can refer you to the hospital for checks.
- Make sure you attend the regular appointments with your audiology team, if you already wear a hearing aid.
- Maintain your hearing aid by keeping it clean and replacing batteries regularly.

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a common condition where bones become very fragile and weak, making them easy to break. There are many factors that may increase your risk of osteoporosis, such as:

- A broken bone after a minor bump or fall.
- A family history of a broken hip after a minor bump or fall.
- Taking corticosteroid tablets such as cortisone or prednisolone for more than six months.
- A loss of height of more than five centimetres (cm).
- Going through the menopause before the age of 45.
- Irregular periods that stopped for 12 months or more, for reasons other than pregnancy or the menopause
- Drinking heavily.
- Frequently suffering from diarrhoea, caused by problems such as coeliac disease or Crohn's disease.
- Suffering from certain medical conditions such as:
 - Rheumatoid arthritis
 - Malabsorption syndrome
 - Chronic kidney disease
 - Liver disease
 - Low testosterone levels in men

Having one or more of these factors may make you at risk of osteoporosis. Your GP or practice nurse can advise you about further tests or treatment, if necessary, so consult them if you are concerned. If you are diagnosed with osteoporosis, there are treatments available to help strengthen bones.

Tips to protect your bones:

- Stop smoking as this can damage the bone building cells in your body.
- Keep your alcohol intake low. Too much alcohol can destroy bones and make you unsteady.
- Try to take some sort of exercise – see our section on 'Stay fit for life'.
- Try to go outdoors often, as daylight is an important source of vitamin D which is essential for strong bones.
- Eat a well-balanced diet – see the 'Does my diet make a difference' section.

Stay fit for life

Regular exercise and movement can help decrease your risk of falling by helping to strengthen your muscles and bones.

- Always check with your GP or nurse before starting a new type of physical activity or returning to exercise after a break. They can also help provide advice on diet and nutrition.
- Follow the recommended level of exercise for your general health.
- Build up to walks that last half an hour, at least four times a week. Ideally, you should do a short walk every day.
- Walking regularly can be just as beneficial as bursts of very energetic activity.
- Remember to warm up and cool down with some gentle stretching.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing and suitable footwear.
- Sticks can be a useful aid for balance – some even fold out into a seat.
- Try to plan a route that has things to see and benches at certain points for rests, if you need them.
- Tell someone where you are going and when to expect you back.
- Ask your GP or nurse if they have an 'Exercise Referral Scheme'. Some GPs prescribe exercise at participating gyms. Often this is available at a reduced cost or free.
- Check with your local gym or class provider for information about exercise classes. There are different types of classes suitable for all ages and abilities. These include aerobics, pilates and gentle exercise.
- Swimming pools also provide sessions and are able to support individuals with limited mobility.

If you are housebound, you can still do regular arm and leg movements while sitting in a chair. Ask your GP or nurse about this.

Do not:

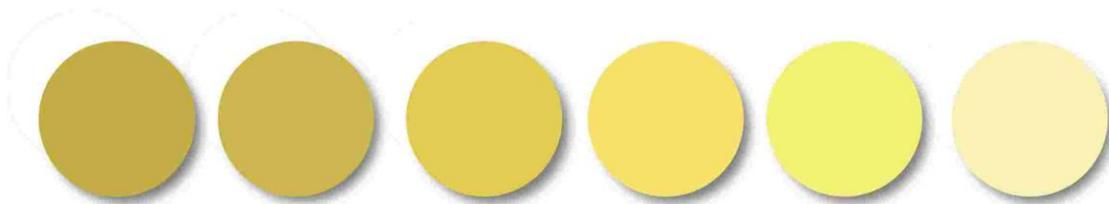
- Exercise if you are tired, ill or just after eating.
- Try not to overdo it – build things up gradually.
- Make sudden or jerky movements such as tipping or turning your head. Standing up quickly can cause dizziness.

Staying hydrated

To stay well hydrated, you need to drink enough liquid. This will improve your overall health and reduce your risk of illness, falls and infection.

You may be dehydrated if you suffer from headaches, dizziness, confusion or tiredness. You should discuss these symptoms with a health professional. Being dehydrated affects blood pressure and can increase your risks of falls.

Checking the colour of your urine is one way of telling if you are drinking enough. Dark, strong smelling urine may be an indication that your body is dehydrated or that you have a urine infection. You can check your urine against these colours:



Ideally your urine should be a pale straw colour – the clearer the better. If in doubt get it, checked out.

For our bodies to function well, we need to drink regularly throughout the day. Some drinks are better at hydrating us, for example, water is excellent.

As a general guide:

- Aim to drink between 1.5 and 2.5 litres (2.5 to 4 pints) of fluid a day, unless your health professional gives you different advice. This is roughly six to eight glasses (250ml per glass).
- This can be taken in a variety of hot and cold drinks. Aim for at least four glasses of water a day.
- Keep caffeinated drinks to a minimum. Try changing to caffeine-free tea or coffee.
- Tap water is an ideal choice. It is free and contains no sugar or calories.
- Milk, fruit juice and squash are good alternatives to water.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink.

Does my diet make a difference?

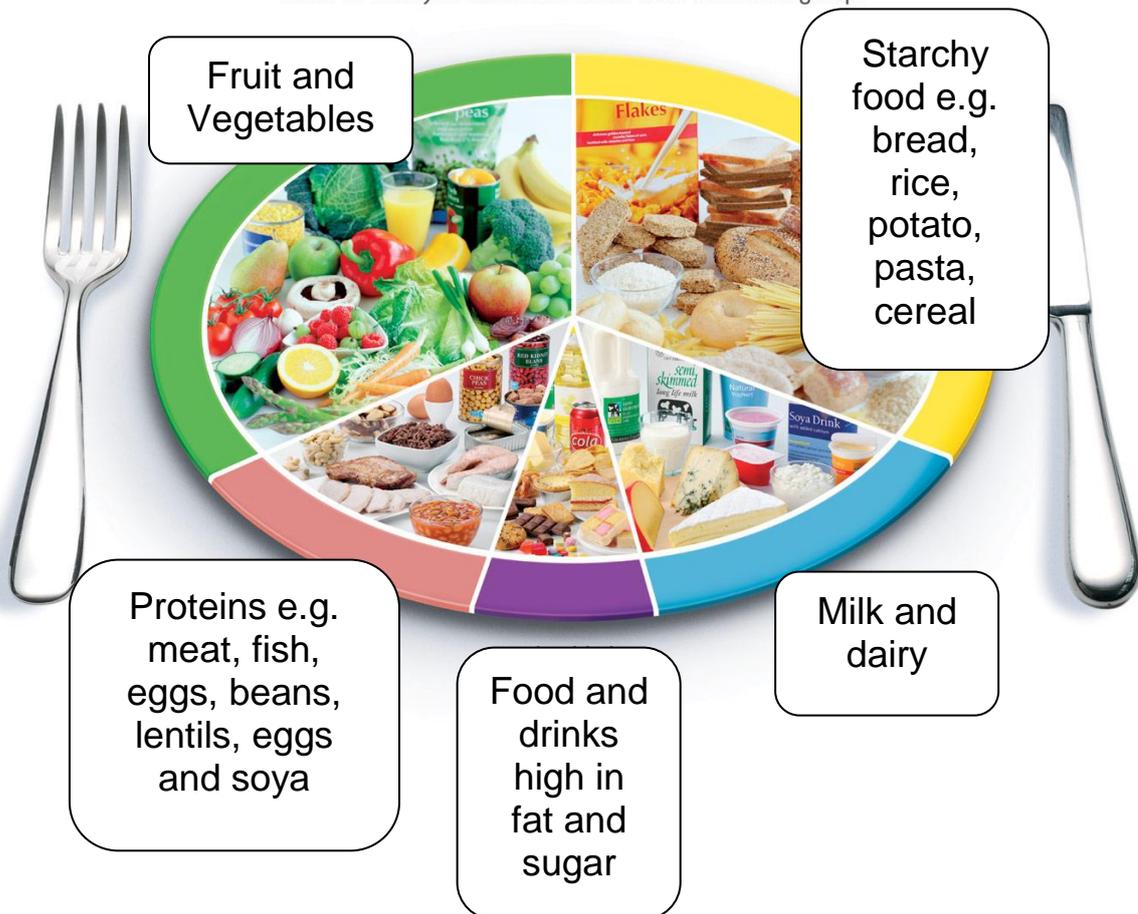
Yes, what you eat makes a difference. It is important to eat a well-balanced diet, to take in all the protein, vitamins, minerals and other nutrients your body needs. Eating a well-balanced diet helps to keep bones and muscles healthy and in good working order. Having strong bones and muscles helps to prevent falls.

The diagram below shows the proportions of food you should eat to achieve a healthy, balanced diet. Your weekly meal plan should use some of the foods below to give a varied, interesting and portion-controlled diet. It may be a good idea to have five or six smaller meals rather than three large ones.

The eatwell plate



Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.



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Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, the Scottish Government and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

Calcium and vitamin D

Calcium and vitamin D are particularly important vitamins.

Calcium

A good supply of calcium is essential for the development of strong, healthy bones and for the prevention of soft, brittle bones (known as osteoporosis) in later life. Milk and dairy foods are the best sources of calcium. These include:

- Milk
- Cheese
- Yoghurts
- Fromage frais
- Milky puddings

Other sources of calcium include:

- Fish with soft bones such as sardines, salmon and pilchards
- Dried fruits such as apricots, prunes, raisins and dates
- Dark leafy green vegetables
- Kidney beans and lentils
- Bread, especially white bread
- Nuts

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is needed by your body to absorb the calcium from your diet. The main source of vitamin D comes from the action of sunlight on your skin, so try to spend some time in the sunlight every day. If this is not possible, vitamin D can also be obtained from certain foods.

Food sources of vitamin D include:

- Margarine
- Eggs
- Liver
- Oily fish such as pilchards, mackerel, salmon and sardines
- Breakfast cereals

What should I do if I have a fall?

It is a good idea to be prepared as knowing what to do could save a life.

- Try to keep calm.
- If you have a panic button, call for help even if you think you are OK.
- Check to see if you are near a telephone to call for help. If in doubt, call the emergency services (111 or 999).
- If your phone has speed dial buttons, have them programmed so you do not have to remember phone numbers if you are in pain or shock.
- If your neighbours may hear you, try calling for help. You may want to give them a key in case of emergencies.
- Check the area for any items you may have dropped and broken. You do not want to injure yourself any more by moving onto broken objects or slipping on split liquid.
- You may want to try getting up from the floor. Think about how you can do this in stages, moving so you are nearer a chair or settee first. Then get on your hands and knees before getting up.
- Try and keep warm. See if there is a blanket, coat or towel nearby that you can use.

What should I do if someone else has a fall?

Be prepared as knowing what to do could save a life:

S – **S**top

T – Give yourself **T**ime to think

O – **O**bserve the situation

P – **P**rotect yourself and do not put yourself in danger

Do:

- Try to keep calm.
- Check for danger – are there signs of any liquids or broken items such as glass or crockery? Do not put yourself in danger.
- Check the casualty for a response:
 - Q: Are they alert? Can they see and hear you?
 - Q: Are there any obvious signs that they are in pain?
 - Q: Can they tell you what happened?
 - Q: Are they unresponsive such as asleep or unconscious?
- Call for help – dial 999. Use the panic button if the casualty is part of a warden scheme, or call for a neighbour.
- Follow the advice given by the emergency services to check and make the casualty comfortable.
- Try to keep the casualty calm, warm and reassured until help arrives.

Do not:

- Give them anything to eat or drink.
- Put yourself at risk – call for help instead.

Keeping warm

When the weather is cold, you can easily suffer from hypothermia if the temperature of your home is not maintained. Falls that occur during cold weather, particularly if you are lying on the ground for even a short period of time, can result in serious consequences.

Tips for keeping warm

- Ensure your home is heated to no lower than 21°C.
- Keep internal doors closed to stop draughts.
- Have at least one hot meal a day and have plenty of hot drinks.
- Layer up – it is best to wear layers of clothing.
- Use a regularly-serviced electric blanket or heat pad.
- Close the curtains when it starts going dark.
- Keep your heating on overnight and close windows.
- Contact your energy supplier and find out about social tariffs or Priority Services Register schemes.
- Ensure your home is well insulated and your boiler is serviced regularly.

Can I find out more?

Here are some local contacts.

Dudley Falls Service

Helps older people to reduce their risk of falling and maintain their independence. Dudley Falls Service is a free service for people over 65 years who have fallen recently, are at risk of falling or have concerns about their balance.

If you would like a falls adviser to visit you in your home, please contact any health professional, including your GP or nurse. Alternatively call the Falls Service direct on 01384 814459.

Living well, feeling safe service

The living well, feeling safe service is a partnership between the Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council and other organisations and charities.

The partnership aims to help older people to age well, meaning that they can stay independent, happy and safe in their own homes. They do this by providing a whole range of support services to older people. This service can make a huge difference in many older people's lives, ensuring that they can continue to live independently and comfortably.

For more information, or to request a home visit, please call 01384 817743.

Dudley Telecare Service

The Dudley Telecare Service operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. A range of telecare solutions like falls detectors, can be installed within homes. The products provide support to people in their own homes, through their link to the Dudley Telecare Service. The products can be linked to an emergency alarm, monitoring service or carer's mobile phone.

At the Dudley Telecare Service, professional and experienced call handlers take calls direct from customers. They also make response calls to customers who have triggered the telecare equipment, checking if help or assistance is required.

Staff within the Telecare Service have been trained by the West Midlands Ambulance to provide falls response to people who have fallen but who are uninjured and just require assistance to get back up.

For more information about the products available, call on 0300 555 2040 or visit <http://www.gadgetgateway.org.uk/>

Access to Adult Social Care

The Access to Adult Social Care Team offers adult social care advice, support and care tailored to people's specific needs. The team helps people to make the right choices for them, their loved ones or the people they care for. Contact the team on 0300 555 0055.

Other useful websites

www.ageuk.org.uk

www.arthritiscare.org.uk

www.gadgetgateway.org.uk

www.parkinsons.org.uk

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:
The Dudley Falls Service on 01384 814459

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

للحصول على هذه النشرة بحجم أكبر، وعلى شكل إصدار صوتي و بلغات أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال بالرقم 08000730510.

此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

ਇਹ ਪਰਚਾ ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ, ਬੋਲ ਕੇ ਰੀਕਾਰਡ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੋਇਆ ਅਤੇ ਦੂਸਰੀਆਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ, 0800 073 0510 ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜੀ।

Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru vă rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

یہ کتابچہ آپ کو بڑے حروف کی لکھائی، سمعی صورت اور دیگر زبانوں میں مہیا کیا جا سکتا ہے۔ برائے مہربانی فون نمبر 08000730510 پر رابطہ کریں۔