



Bristol
Community
Health



Maximising independence

A guide to managing
frailty symptoms





Introduction

What is frailty?

NHS England describes frailty as **a loss of resilience that means people don't bounce back quickly after a physical or mental illness, an accident or other stressful event**. As people age their bodies gradually accumulate changes to health, leaving them vulnerable to deterioration.

Frailty develops slowly over years with lots of small issues adding up. As a result, emergencies for frail people are usually triggered by seemingly small events such as a minor infection, a fall, or a change in medication.

Due to people now living longer, frailty is becoming more common and we are beginning to talk about how it affects peoples lives, and what can be done to help.

Frailty is often subtle to start with, and for this reason it often goes unidentified for some time.

Changing perceptions

Research shows that the public view the term 'frailty' negatively. Bristol Community Health and many other organisations across the UK are working to renew the term and show that **frailty does not just relate to someone who is incapable**. Frailty is now widely accepted to be **a long-term health condition** and Bristol Community Health aims to work alongside patients affected so that they can live life well.

The aim of this booklet is to educate patients, carers and relatives about frailty. This includes:

- What frailty means
- How it might affect people day-to-day
- Things to look out for
- Tips on how to maximise independence and quality of life

A guide to frailty

1. Very fit

Active
Energetic
Motivated
Fittest for their age



2. Well

No active disease
Less fit
Active occasionally,
e.g. seasonally



3. Managing

Medical issues well-
managed
Not regularly active
beyond walking



4. Coping

Symptoms limit activity
Not dependent for daily
help but...
Sometimes 'slowed up'
or 'tired'



5. Mildly frail

More evident slowing
Need help with
domestic tasks
Need support with outdoor
activity e.g. shopping and
meal preparation



6. Moderately frail

Need help with
outside activity
Help with domestic tasks
Stairs are harder
May need support
with bathing



7. Severely frail

Needs support for all
personal care
Medically stable but
requires monitoring
Not mobile beyond short
distances

No matter what your age, it is possible to become frail. A younger person may fracture a limb and need increased support, making them temporarily more frail. They may start at a 1 then become a level 5 during treatment, and slowly return to a level 1 as they rehabilitate.

The same occurs with the older population, but the trigger required may be smaller. For example, it may be an infection or fall that preceded a change in frailty and it may take longer to recover due to age. Sometimes it may not be possible to fully return to the previous level of function.

The overall change in frailty level could be short or long-term depending on the circumstances.

Reference: Rockwood K, Song X, MacKnight C, et al. A global clinical measure of fitness and frailty in elderly people. *CMAJ*. 2005.

Using this booklet

There are lots of factors that may increase the risk of complications related to frailty.

This booklet outlines the most common frailty risk factors. A Bristol Community Health clinician will help to identify which aspects, if any, are relevant to your needs.

Staff member to tick relevant chapters

- Falls risk: staying steady
- Keeping mobile
- Environment, function and independence
- Pain that affects function
- Continence management
- Skin care
- Diet and nutrition (including weight loss)
- Memory and mental health

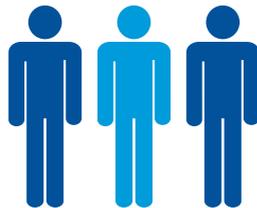


1. Falls risk: staying steady

Dizziness: Dizziness is a risk factor for falls. If you experience feeling dizzy when you stand, move around or change direction. This may need to be discussed with your GP.

Vision and hearing: Our senses interpret information from the world around us to maintain balance. Regular vision and hearing checks will help identify issues early.

People aged 60 and over may be eligible for free eye and hearing tests on the NHS - turn to page 21 for more information.



1 in 3 adults over the age of 65 fall each year

Sensation: Sensation affects balance. People experiencing a change or reduction in sensation in their legs/arms may benefit from a review of this.

Other risk factors: Alcohol and some medications can affect balance – even if you only have a minor issue with your balance. Minimise your alcohol intake to reduce your risk of falls.

Please refer to the 'Home safety checklist' on page 16 for tips on how to minimise risks around your home.



2. Keeping mobile

Other risk factors: Taking lots of different tablets can affect your mobility. If you notice you are dizzy or are not feeling yourself for a period of time, especially after a change in medication, a medication review might be of use. This can be done via your pharmacy or GP.

Other risk factors: Ensure shoes fit well, have enough grip and aren't at risk of slipping off. Foot problems can significantly affect safe mobility – those with foot issues may benefit from discussing possible solutions with a healthcare professional.

People with diabetes should be especially aware of good foot care.

Walking aids: Some people may benefit from a walking aid to maintain safe walking and independence.

Ask a healthcare professional about an assessment for this if it is relevant.

Exercise: It's never too late to begin exercise! Gentle exercises can help build strength and coordination at any age. There are many community classes available or a healthcare professional can create an at-home exercise programme for you, if they deem it appropriate.*

* Turn to page 17 for simple exercises to try at home.

3. Environment, function and independence

Safe home: Ensure hazards are removed to reduce risk of falls, skin grazes etc. Take a look at the list on page 16 for more suggestions.

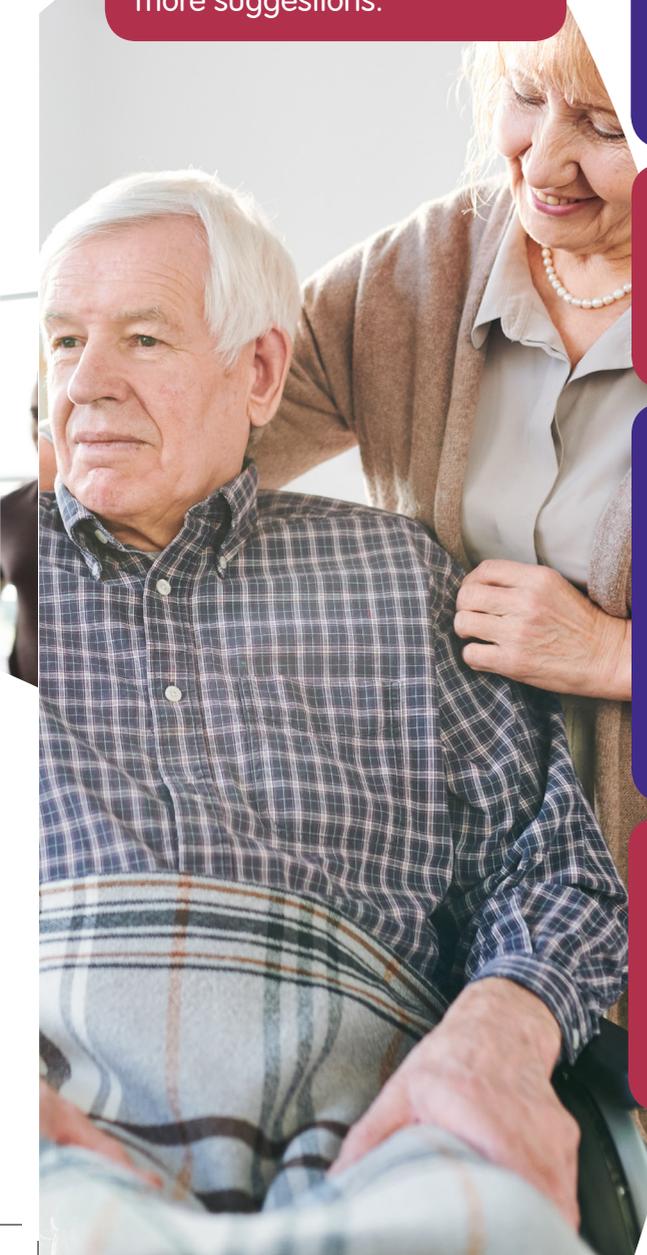
Local amenities: Staying connected to your local community is important for quality of life and mental wellbeing. There are often accessible transport services, activity centres and support with shopping.*

Carer support: People who support someone with daily needs is a carer. There is support and advice available for carers.*

Maintaining independence: If you struggle with functional tasks like bathing, dressing, toileting or preparing meals, there is help available. Health services can work alongside people and help maintain independence. For an assessment contact Care Direct or Red Cross Carers.*

Occupational therapy: People experiencing short-term functional issues may require an occupational therapy assessment to provide support, equipment and education.

* See our useful contacts list on page 21



4. Pain that affects function

Ask for help: As we age, our body endures more wear and tear through activity, but pain is not a natural part of aging. Evidence shows that people who experience pain often don't ask for help.

Take regular pain control: In some long-term conditions it is not always possible to completely stop pain, but it may be possible to minimise symptoms. Taking regular pain control, as prescribed, should help.

Close to 50% of community-based adults over 65 report pain that affects their function on a regular basis. You are not alone!

Take regular pain control: Regular pain can cause people to become inactive. Over time, this impacts on your strength, which in turn increases risk of falling and reduces independence, mood and quality of life.

Tackling pain symptoms makes it easier to lead a more active and better-quality lifestyle.



5. Continence management

Incontinence or sweat can damage skin. Keep skin clean, dry and moisturised.

Drink more water: Drinking less fluid makes urine more concentrated, which irritates your bladder. This can make you feel like you need to go, even when your bladder is empty.

Avoid caffeine: Highly caffeinated drinks can overstimulate your bladder – try reducing your intake or switching to decaf.

Investigate symptoms: New incontinence, pain while urinating, urgency to pass urine/stools, increased frequency, or blood in your urine or stools can all be signs of ill health and need to be investigated.

Report any of these symptoms to a healthcare professional.

Changes to bladder or bowel habits (e.g. rushing to get to the toilet) could increase your risk of falling. Talk to a healthcare professional if this applies.



Speak to a professional: Many people find talking about incontinence embarrassing, which makes it hard to seek help – even though it's very common. Try to remember that continence is a bodily function just like anything else and there's lots you can do to improve your continence. Speak to a healthcare professional - you can request to see a female/male practitioner if this makes you feel more comfortable and NHS staff will make every effort for this to be provided.

6. Skin care

Keep moving and change position regularly. This could be a short walk between rooms or marching on the spot for a few seconds. This will reduce pressure on the skin by improving circulation to the area and aiding muscle/skin health. It also eases joint stiffness.

There is a direct link between reduced mobility and maintaining healthy skin. This is because reduced movement = more pressure placed on the skin in areas that are in contact with surfaces.

Any new issues with skin, especially wounds or a painful skin area should be reported to a GP or nurse – they can provide advice/support on how to manage this.

Check skin daily for marks, especially your buttocks and bony bits.

See our 'hotspots' card on page 14 for more information.

Older people often have more fragile/easily broken skin. Any issues with broken skin (wounds/sores/grazes), even in small areas, can increase frailty due to secondary issues such as infection if they are not managed properly.



7. Diet and nutrition



Balanced diet: Eating a balanced diet including proteins, carbohydrates and some fats is important to maintain a healthy weight. Protein is particularly important as it maintains muscle mass and strength. Try to include a portion of protein in every meal.

Appetite: Eating regular meals is important in maintaining health. If you have a low appetite, try to eat little and often, including some extra snacks and nourishing drinks.

Weight loss: Losing weight is **not** a normal part of aging. Unintentional weight loss (a sign may be clothing rapidly becoming too big), people with poor appetite, those unable to eat adequate meal sizes, or anyone who has issues chewing/swallowing should consult a healthcare professional, as there are many alternative ways to maintain adequate nutrition/weight.

Supplements: Vitamin D and calcium are particularly important in maintaining general wellbeing and healthy bones. Vitamin D can be sourced from exposure to the sun, but supplements are useful to all adults as it is difficult to eat the amount we need. This may be particularly important for people who don't get much sun exposure, or older people.

Stay hydrated: Maintaining adequate fluid is essential for kidney function and avoiding illness. The recommended daily intake is 1.5-2 litres – that's 6-8 medium glasses per day. People with a heart condition should consult their doctor for specific advice, as fluid balance can vary and is particularly important.

Help with preparing meals: A common issue with maintaining nutrition is finding it difficult to prepare meals or go food shopping. There are services available in the community, including food delivery - turn to page 21 for a list of useful contacts.

For more information on a healthy diet, turn to page 15.

8. Memory and mental health

Memory: Sometimes as people get older they can have problems with their memory, causing issues with thinking, problem solving and communication.

If you are worried about your memory, or that of a family member, seek advice from a healthcare professional or the Alzheimer's Society (contact details can be found on page 21).

Loneliness: People can become isolated/lonely for a variety of reasons such as:

- Getting older, leading to difficulty getting out
- No longer being the hub of the family
- Leaving the workplace
- Deaths of spouses and friends
- Disability/illness

Many older people experience loneliness (over 1 million in the UK) but there are organisations in Bristol which aim to tackle this - see page 21 for contact details.

Delirium: Delirium is an uncommon but serious condition that causes temporary changes in behaviour and memory, including confusion and sometimes hallucinations.

It often develops soon after infection, surgery, hospital admission, changes to medication, poor nutrition or dehydration.

It can last for days, weeks or occasionally months – if you have any concerns, you should contact a healthcare professional.

Stay active: Regular exercise, such as walking, has been proven to prevent mental illnesses in later life and raise your mood.

Even doing exercises in a chair can help regulate sleep, improve your sense of wellbeing and reduce stress. Turn to page 17 for a list of exercises to try at home.

Group exercise is thought to be most beneficial in older people due its social nature. Contact Well Aware for details on exercise options (details on page 21).

Summary

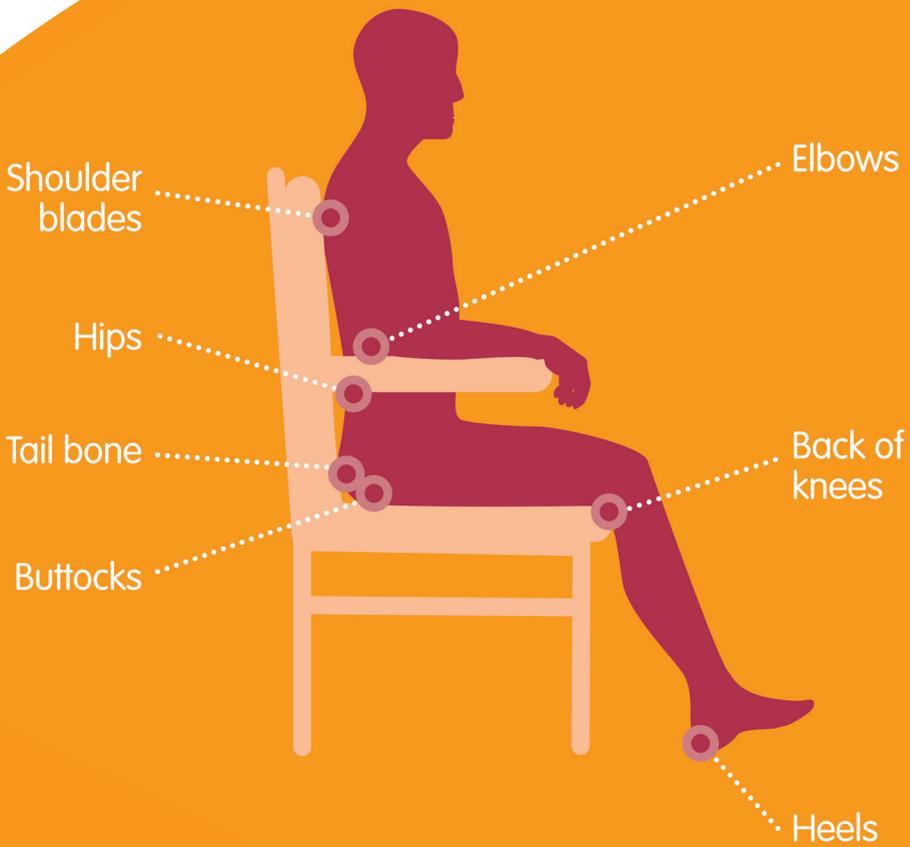
Sometimes as people age – or even when younger, if due to long-term health conditions – bodies struggle to maintain their natural fitness.

Don't worry – it is never too late to improve. It may just take a little more effort to keep fit.

It is important to remember:

- Everybody's journey is different. Set small, achievable goals daily, weekly or monthly to maintain motivation.
- Being sedentary/inactive can cause many additional health problems. Try to keep as healthy and active as possible.
- Maintain a good diet (see the Eatwell Guide on page 15).
- Adjustments could mean slight adaptations to lifestyle, or getting assistance from a healthcare professional to help along the way.
- Small details matter. Do not underestimate the difference a few changes can make in helping to maintain quality of life. It all adds up!
- Asking for help shows strength not weakness – everyone needs a helping hand sometimes.
- Healthcare professionals can provide support when needed to maintain independence and quality of life, but it is also up to the individual to help maintain themselves. Be proactive!

Appendix 1: Pressure sore hot spots



Appendix 2: Eatwell Guide

Use the Eatwell Guide to help you get a balance of healthier and more sustainable food. It shows how much of what you eat overall should come from each food group.

Check the label on packaged foods

Each serving (150g) contains

Energy 1046kJ 250kcal	Fat 3.0g	Saturates 1.3g	Sugars 34g	Salt 0.9g
	LOW	LOW	HIGH	MED
13%	4%	7%	38%	15%

of an adult's reference intake

Typical values (as sold) per 100g: 697kJ/ 167kcal

Choose foods lower in fat, salt and sugars



Water, lower fat milk, sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee all count.

Limit fruit juice and/or smoothies to a total of 150ml a day.



Eat less often and in small amounts

Per day 2000kcal 2500kcal = ALL FOOD + ALL DRINKS

Appendix 3: Home safety checklist

- Declutter: clear furniture from walkways; tidy wires; remove rugs/ tape edges to avoid tripping.
- Ensure there is sufficient lighting and handrails on stairs, and keep free of clutter.
- Move heavy or difficult items in the kitchen to a height that does not require bending low or reaching high.
- Consider grab rails and non-slip mats in the bathroom – this is a slippery area!
- Put a lamp in reach of the bed. If the area between your bedroom and bathroom is dark, consider a hallway night light.
- Keep emergency numbers that are easy to read next to phones.
- Carry a phone in the house, or have a pendant alarm so help can be called at all times.
- Get a fire safety check from the fire service. They can install a fire alarm if needed, free of charge.
- Raise or change chairs that are too low or difficult to get up from.
- Place stools around the house to use as a rest, especially if you become breathless/experience pain when walking. Keep outdoor paths tidy from weeds/shrubs and keep paving in good condition.
- Ensure heating is in good working order (over 18 °C). Cold houses can cause chest problems or contribute to flu.
- Consider organising access to the property in an emergency, e.g. key safe.
- Consider creating access to a toilet on each level of your home.
- Think through the trip hazard a pet may cause. Consider shutting them in living room whilst answering the front door.



Appendix 4: Chair-based exercises for functional maintenance

Completing daily exercises long-term is proven to maintain abilities by helping to...

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ↑ STRENGTH | ↓ DEPRESSION |
| ↑ POWER | ↓ BODY FAT |
| ↑ FLEXIBILITY | ↓ ARTHRITIC PAIN |
| ↑ ABILITY TO PERFORM
DAILY TASKS | ↓ POSTURAL BLOOD
PRESSURE ISSUES |
| ↑ BALANCE | ↓ RISK OF FALLS |

Try to work the exercises over the next few pages into a daily routine.

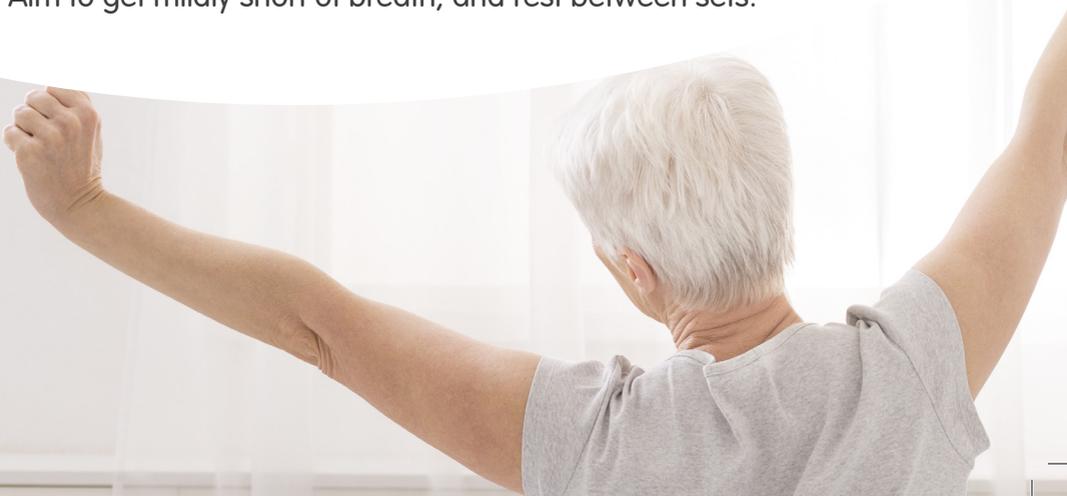
1. Ankle and wrist movements

Rotate 10 times in each direction, repeating for both right and left sides.

2. Seated leg marching

Lifting knees as high as possible, march briskly for 30 seconds. Complete 3 sets of 30 seconds.

Aim to get mildly short of breath, and rest between sets.



3. Seated bending and straightening knees

Straighten the knee and tense the thigh muscle. Hold for 5 seconds. Now fully bend knee under the chair, tensing the muscle at back of the thigh. Hold for 5 seconds.

Repeat 10 straight and 10 bends, both right and left legs.

4. Seated arm lifts

This exercise can be completed with a light weight (e.g. a small bottle water) if you wish.

Start at shoulder height and press arm up towards the ceiling, as close to the ear as possible. Hold for 5 seconds.

Complete 10 times on the right and left sides.

5. Seated spinal rotations

Sit tall in your chair and place your hands across your chest.

Turn to look behind you to right and hold 5 seconds. Slowly rotate to other side and do the same.

Repeat 10 times on the right and left sides.



Only complete the exercises below if you are able to walk around the house without assistance from another person. If walking with supervision is required to maintain safety, complete exercises 1-5 only – do not attempt exercises 6 and 7.

6. Sit to stand

Practice moving from sitting to standing from your main chair. Think about the following stages for good technique:

- A. Move bottom forwards in chair.
- B. Tuck feet back under the chair.
- C. Lean head and shoulders forward over feet (nose over toes).
- D. Use arms and legs to push up into standing.
- E. Maintain chest forward position – hold walking aid if appropriate.

7. Brisk walking (with a walking aid if you usually use one)

Practice walking at your usual level, i.e. indoors vs outdoors.

Walk at a brisk but steady pace until you feel short of breath. Rest in a seated position.

Complete at least 3 walking sets per day – more is beneficial as long as you do not feel overly fatigued by doing this exercise.

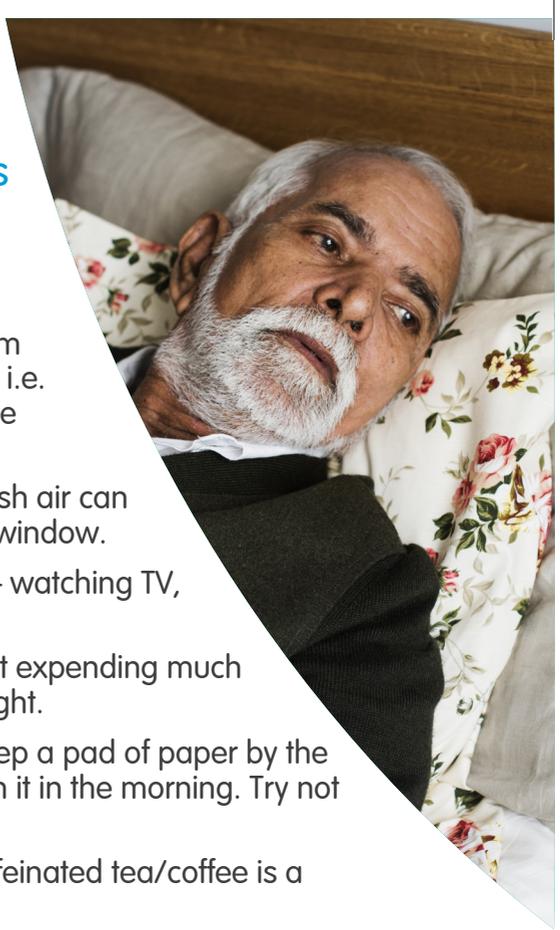


Appendix 5: Sleep well tips

10 tips for a more restful night:

1. Make sure the bed and bedroom are a comfortable environment, i.e. supportive mattress, comfortable temperature.
2. Ensure good air circulation – fresh air can help you sleep. Try a fan/open window.
3. Allow time to relax before bed – watching TV, listening to music, reading etc.
4. Keep active during the day – not expending much energy can lead to a restless night.
5. If something is on your mind keep a pad of paper by the bed, write it down and deal with it in the morning. Try not to dwell on it at night.
6. Avoid caffeine after 4pm, decaffeinated tea/coffee is a useful switch.
7. Try not to nap during the day – it can lead to wakeful nights and a mixed up pattern.
8. If you go to the toilet a lot during the evening, try changing the pattern of your fluid intake – drink **more** during the day and reduce fluid intake after 6pm. It is important that you stay hydrated so that your kidneys don't have to work too hard.
9. Hunger: if you eat tea early and wake not knowing why, it may be because you are hungry. Try eating some snacks in the evening before bed (or keep some by your bed) to stave off hunger.
10. If you are a light sleeper try ear plugs and black out curtains for a less disturbed sleep.

If you have tried the above and seen no improvement, contact your GP for assessment/advice.



Appendix 6: Useful contact list

Name	Service provided	Contact
Carers UK	Support for those who care for somebody	0808 808 7777 carersuk.org
Care Direct	Social care advice from the council	0117 922 2700 bristol.gov.uk/adults
Centre for Sustainable Energy	Local charity – supports those vulnerable to cold winters (financial advice available)	0800 082 2234 cse.org.uk
Carers Support Centre	For Bristol and South Gloucestershire relatives, friends and neighbours who help to care for someone	0117 965 2200 carerssupportcentre.org.uk
Well Aware	Information hub for help to access community i.e. activity centres/classes/transport options	0808 808 5252 wellaware.org.uk
Red Cross	Shopping support and befriending service	0117 3012619 redcross.org.uk
We Care Home Improvements	Home safety check/handyman service (sometimes incurs cost)	0300 323 0700 wecar.org.uk
Avon Fire Service	Free home safety assessment	0117 926 2061
Age UK Bristol	A range of services, social activities, and information and advice on health and social matters	0117 9297537 ageuk.org.uk/bristol
Wiltshire Farm Foods	Frozen meals delivered, ready to heat	01275 371993 wiltshirefarmfoods.com
Meals on Wheels	Cooked/hot meals prepared and delivered	0117 9031520
Contact the Elderly	Social groups and support for older people	01934 316578 - Fiona Franklin contact-the-elderly.org.uk
Community Navigators Bristol	Personalised help to find and access community/social activities	0117 951 5751 (North Bristol) 0117 440 9100 (Central, East and South Bristol) communitynavigators.org.uk
NHS 'Outside Clinic' eye test	Free eye test and glasses provision in home, if unable to get out	0800 854 477
Dial-a-Ride	Bristol-based; for those unable to access public transport (small charge applies)	0845 130 1875

Get in touch

Contact us

We're here to help. Get in touch with Bristol Community Health by calling 0117 440 9000.

Tell us what you think

Speak to a member of the team or contact us on the number above to request a 'How are we doing?' leaflet.

You can find out more about the services we provide on our website: www.briscomhealth.org.uk

Is this leaflet hard to read?

Please email briscomhealth.comms@nhs.net or call 0117 440 9000 to ask for it in another format or language.