

# Preventing slips, trips and falls

## A little slip can have a big impact on your life

Although often seen as a minor incident, slips, trips and falls can result in serious fractures, bruising, lacerations and dislocations.

The most common injury associated with a slip, trip or fall is a sprain or strain. Recovery from these injuries can be slow and have long-term effects on work, home and leisure activities.

## Slips

Slips generally happen when traversing a slippery surface, e.g. wet tiles. When we sense a slippery surface we naturally walk more slowly and take smaller steps. If we unexpectedly encounter a situation where there is insufficient friction between our shoes and the floor surface, we may not notice in time to adjust our stride. Hence, a slip occurs.

## Trips

A trip usually occurs when there is a low obstacle in our path which we fail to see or notice. A ridge as low as 10mm can cause a person to trip.

## Falls

Falls can either occur on the same level or from an elevation. Falls on the same level are generally classified as a slip and/or a trip. Falls from heights include falls from ladders, roofs, down stairs or when jumping to a lower level.

## Be alert

Be alert to slip, trip and fall hazards and help to prevent injuries to yourself, your colleagues and students. Making our schools and workplaces safer is everybody's business.

## Things to check

Be mindful of the following factors in your workplace to prevent injuries from occurring:

**Surfaces** — are surfaces wet, oily, icy, mossy, uneven, or is there a change in surfaces from rough to smooth? Can slip resistant flooring be installed?

**Housekeeping and cleanliness** — are your work areas and staff rooms tidy, passageways clear? Are there trip hazards that can be easily fixed, e.g. curled corners on carpet edges, broken tiles or raised paving, schoolbags in classrooms?

**Lighting** — can you clearly see at steps and changes in floor surfacing, does lighting form distracting shadows, is lighting adequate after dark?

**Stairs** — are they too steep, is there inadequate foot space, isolated low doorway steps, inadequate handrails?

**Tasks** — are you carrying or pushing loads that interfere with forward vision, hurrying due to time constraints, distracted while moving about your workplace?

**Footwear** — are you wearing footwear that is appropriate for the task and the areas you access e.g. are your shoes slip resistant for wet or slippery areas, sport shoes worn for outdoor activities?



**Cleaning/spills** — is there polish build-up on floors, are there wet areas during peak hours or spills that need cleaning up?

## What can you do?

While in some instances solving or fixing some slip and trip hazards in your workplace may require larger scale project works, there are many simple, low cost changes that you can make to greatly reduce these risks and improve the safety of your workplace.

- Get involved with your I health and safety committee.
- Discuss possible solutions with your Health and Safety Advisor (HSA).
- Reduce your own clutter to eliminate trip hazards on the floor.
- Check access ways and help keep them clear.
- Regularly review work areas and look for ideas to improve storage.
- Wear footwear that is suitable for the task you are doing and the surface you are moving on.
- Identify potential hazards and suggest solutions, e.g. repair lighting in walkway areas, use alternative access ways.
- Choose appropriate locations to carry out tasks, for example, avoid creating mess, spills or clutter in access ways.
- Don't walk past a hazard — report it, sign it or fix it.
- Don't rush.
- Be aware of your surroundings – e.g. when using mobile phones, don't walk and text.

## Preventing falls from heights

Serious injuries can occur from quite low heights. As soon as you start to climb up, there is an increased risk of an incident and potential injury. Injuries commonly result from:

- losing grip on a ladder or handrail
- overbalancing
- misjudging a step or having obstructed vision
- leaning, sitting or standing on an object that is not designed to take weight
- using chairs or desks instead of ladders; or
- using poorly maintained equipment.

## Things to remember:

- Can the job be done differently — e.g. can you avoid climbing by using an extendable tool for opening/shutting louvres, accessing switches, classroom displays, cleaning?
- Always use the appropriate equipment for the task, e.g. use a small step ladder or for higher work use a ladder with appropriate height or extension. Don't climb on chairs or tables for convenience.
- Report poor maintenance; e.g. be aware of damaged rungs on ladders.
- Assess the risks for yourself bearing in mind your own capabilities, e.g. dexterity, fitness level, balance issues, fear of heights.



- Be aware of obstructions or other hazards at all times — including those above your head, e.g. electrical wires.
- Does the task require two people? Ask for help!
- Report hazards to your health and safety committee or Health and Safety Advisor.

## For more information:

Visit the [Creating Healthier Workplaces](#) website.

Contact your regional office for further assistance about:

- health and safety
- injury management

Contact details are available on the [Creating Healthier Workplaces](#) website.