

Walking with strength and balance

Knee Bends

1

Position your feet hip width apart. Stand up tall and look ahead. Use a support if you need it.



2

Bend your knees slightly.



3

Come back up, keeping your back straight.



4

Repeat exercise 5 times.
Build up to 10 or more over time.



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Introduction

This toolkit has been developed by Paths for All to support health and social care staff promote and implement walking with strength and balance activities for older adults.

The activities and resources in this toolkit have been developed and used in a range of services and settings including care homes, hospitals, care-at-home services and sheltered housing.

Walking with strength and balance for older adults in care settings matters because it encourages and supports greater mobility, independence, and confidence, helping to reduce the risk of falls, or a repeat fall.

This toolkit is a step-by-step guide to help you develop and deliver a successful walking with strength and balance initiative. It contains practical advice on how to get started, what training and resources are available from Paths for All, who to speak with to build support and capacity, how to measure the impact your project has on individuals through increased mobility and stability, and the importance of celebrating your successes.

There are also examples and case studies of walking with strength and balance initiatives from a range of healthcare settings.



All the information in this toolkit has been gathered through the corresponding, [Moving Forward: Walking with Strength and Balance Evaluation report](#). It's highly recommended to read the Evaluation report to gain a deeper insight of how this work has developed with Paths for All and healthcare professionals since its inception.



About Paths for All

Paths for All is a Scottish charity whose vision is for Scotland to be a walking nation where everyone has the opportunity to be active every day, creating a happier, healthier and greener Scotland.



Paths for All's [Dementia Friendly Walking programme](#) was established in 2015 to support people living with dementia and carers to access walking opportunities. The programme includes working with the Scottish Health Walk Network to make community Health Walks more welcoming and accessible for people living with dementia through training and resources for volunteer Walk Leaders. We work with outdoor access professionals and volunteers to improve walking environments for people with dementia, and work with health and social care settings to create opportunities for people in receipt of care to benefit from increased walking and physical activity, including strength and balance.



To find out more about the work of Paths for All visit www.pathsforall.org.uk



Why walking with strength and balance matters

Walking with strength and balance activities are important for older adults because they improve bone and muscle health, physical capacity, and function. These activities are safe, and low risk, and can be done in most care settings.

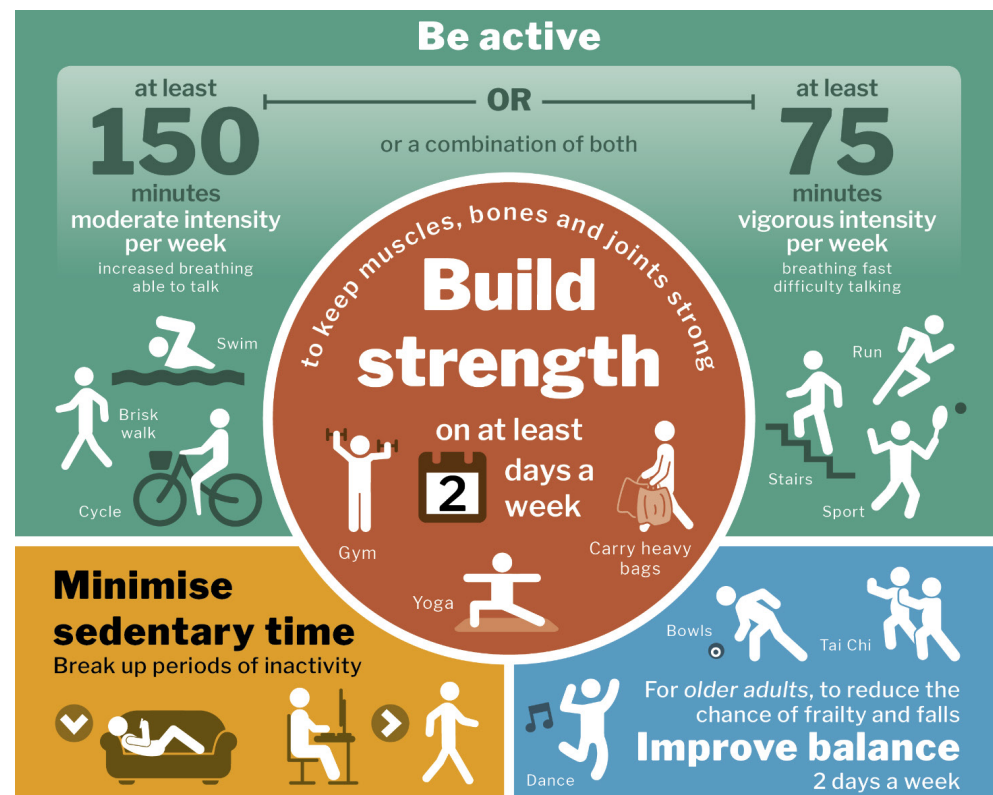


The UK Chief Medical Officers' [Physical Activity Guidelines](#) recommend that **all adults** should:

- Aim to be **active for at least 150 minutes per week**. This includes moderate physical activity like walking, cycling, running and swimming
- **Reduce and break up time spent sitting**
- Incorporate activity which **improves muscle strength** twice each week
- Adults over 65 should take part in **activity that improves balance and coordination** twice a week

“The value to older adults of activities which improve strength, balance and flexibility cannot be overstated. These components of fitness help maintain physical function, reduce the risk of falls, and help people feel more confident and able to meet the physical activity guidelines. It is now emphasised that activities to improve strength, balance and flexibility can be incorporated into sessions that also involve moderate physical activity, such as walking, rather than necessarily being in addition.”

UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines 2019.



Maintaining or regaining mobility through muscle strengthening activity can be built into daily practice and care plans. Improving stability can lower the risk of falls, or a repeat fall, and can sustain individual confidence to keep moving.

Walking and strength and balance resources

Paths for All has developed a range of resources in collaboration with healthcare staff and people in receipt of care. All the resources are dementia friendly, with clear graphics and accessible text. The resources outlined below are designed to support physical activity opportunities and allow for both supervised and independent use.

Care About Walking

A pack of resources designed with care home residents that details the benefits of walking. An information booklet includes ways to get started, and how to stay motivated. A step count wall chart allows users to track their daily steps and set weekly goals to progress towards. There are also guidance notes for staff to help support the person being cared for and motivational posters which can be displayed throughout the care setting.



[All Care About Walking resources are free to download.](#)

Strength and Balance – training

A half-day workshop for healthcare staff that explains why walking with strength and balance is the key to keeping active in older age. Attendees will learn how to encourage mobility and increase physical activity by building strength and balance into daily care.

Learning outcomes include:

- Understanding physical, social and wellbeing effects of ageing
- Understanding the benefits of being active
- Awareness of current physical activity guidelines for adults
- Understanding why walking with strength and balance is important
- Trying out and practising the ten strength and balance movements

Strength and Balance – cue cards

A set of step-by-step cue cards with graphics that safely guide people through each of the ten strength and balance movements. The cards are designed to be flexible in where and how they are used, either with support from healthcare staff or used independently.

Strength and Balance – vinyl wall stickers

Vinyl stickers which illustrate strength and balance movements, ideally placed along corridors with grab rails or in prominent places. By placing the vinyls far enough apart, it also encourages walking between each movement.



[Cue cards and wall vinyl stickers can be purchased here.](#)

Strength and Balance – external posts

Ten posts with panels which illustrate strength and balance movements, with optional support handles. Designed to be placed along a suitable level path to encourage access to the outdoors and additional walking opportunities. Installations can be customised to the environment, including a smaller number of posts if the available space is compact, or if suitable supports for the panels already exist, e.g. raised flower beds.



To enquire about external strength and balance panels please email SHWN@pathsforall.org.uk



Walking with Nature

An information booklet and outdoor resource kit, which offers guidance and ideas on how to encourage more time spent outdoors through nature-based interests and activities. Considerations have been made for people with dementia, sensory challenges, and cognitive impairment to ensure inclusivity.



[Walking with Nature packs can be purchased here.](#)

Sit Less Move More leaflet

This leaflet was produced by researchers at Glasgow Caledonian University and offers ideas and advice on how to spend less time sitting. It includes space to create a personal action plan.



[The Sit Less Move More leaflet can be downloaded here.](#)

Sit Less Move More report

A research study by the University of Stirling summarising a two-year project exploring physical activity in care homes was published in January 2023. The study examined published research and surveyed and interviewed over 160 care home staff from across the UK to identify opportunities and challenges around embedding a culture of physical activity in care homes. The report contains a set of key recommendations for governments, local authorities, care home providers, managers, and staff.



[The Sit Less Move More report can be downloaded here.](#)

Making the case for your project

Case study example: Home Assessment Recovery Team



Perth and Kinross Home Assessment Recovery Team (HART) upskilled senior staff in Cascade Strength and Balance training, delivered by Paths for All. Seven Senior Reablement Assistants initially utilised this model of delivery to enable them to be more efficient and flexible when training staff internally. Not only was this a more cost-effective way of training all staff, but it also created a low-risk opportunity to pilot and evaluate the training to see how strength and balance would fit into daily practice and client care plans.

After a successful introduction of the walking with strength and balance programme, 140 Reablement Assistants have since been trained and resources are embedded into client packs. Strength and balance training is now embedded into new staff inductions.

When preparing to make the case for why walking with strength and balance is important for your care setting, consider your existing work programmes, targets, and outcomes first, and how increased focus around physical activity may support them. A clear understanding of what opportunities are available and what the drivers for change are is a good starting point, and will help in setting clear outcomes.

Identifying the benefits for people in receipt of care, healthcare staff and the organisation, will determine who and what will be involved, including the scale to be achieved.

The benefits of introducing a structured walking with strength and balance programme into your setting may include:

- Reduction in the number of falls or a repeat fall
- Encourage independent mobility
- Reduction in sedentary behaviour
- Aid patient rehabilitation and reduce time spent in hospital
- Ease demand on reablement services (reduction in length of time care is required)
- Maintain and/or improve level of independence of people living in long term care

A person-centred approach should be taken when making the case for walking with strength and balance. Alongside the practical and logistical factors, understanding the holistic benefits for individuals can create understanding of the wellbeing benefits gained and improvements to a person's quality of life.

For older adults some benefits may include:

- Reduce risk of falling or having a repeat fall
- Maintaining mobility and independence for longer
- Improved confidence in level of ability
- Overall improvement to wellbeing
- Increased willingness to take part in physical activities either independently or with others

If your initiative aims to foster a culture that embeds physical activity within the service or setting in a meaningful and sustainable way, involving patients or residents, families, carers, and staff in the design of your project is essential.

The 'Sit Less Move More' research study by the University of Stirling concluded that to support physical activity in healthcare settings, in a sustainable way, requires a whole-team approach so the activity is embedded into the culture and practices. Everyone in the healthcare setting should be involved, including the management team.



[Sit Less Move More Summary Report - Paths for All | Paths for All](#)

Ideally, you should involve people from the beginning to ensure that there is a sense of ownership and that everyone's needs are being met. Early conversations around barriers and challenges will be invaluable in successfully achieving your project outcomes. Understanding and being able to articulate the needs of your target audience through a consultation process could also assist with making the case for additional funding and resources.

Action points:

1. Review current programmes and identify where walking with strength and balance may support outcomes and/or targets.
2. Define your outcomes, how will this improve your organisation or service and what are the benefits for patients/residents/clients and their families.
3. Consider a consultation process to help identify the needs of your target audiences.

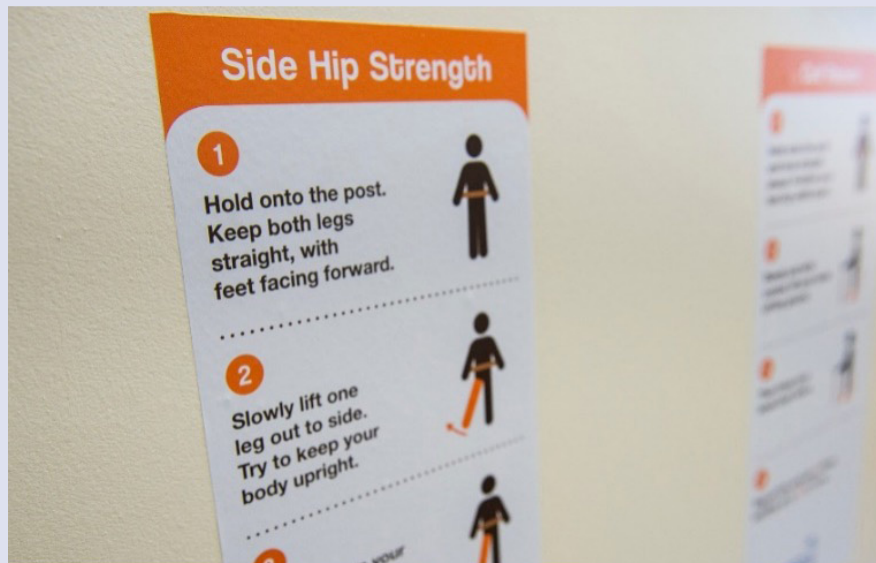
How to plan your project

Case study example: NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde

After a successful trial of Strength and Balance wall stickers on two wards within Royal Alexandra Hospital, the initiative was rolled out across seven more hospitals, and a further ten wards (including surgical and stroke). The initiative is part of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's Active Wards programme which supports a pathway of physical activity interventions supporting patients to be more active before, during and after treatment. Read the full story below:



[Glasgow's Active Wards initiative embraces Strength and Balance - Paths for All | Paths for All](#)



To plan and articulate your project effectively, create a business case which clearly defines your intended outcomes. Outline the benefits for both the service and/or organisation and for the people receiving care. Highlight the difference that implementing this initiative could make and where improvements could make a significant impact.

Think about who should be involved, and what role they will have. What aspects of the initiative will they be directly responsible for contributing to.

Consider where your initiative will take place and how suitable the environment is (internal and/or external). Does the identified environment support increased mobility and physical activity, and if not, what is required to make the suitable adaptations, for example, installing grab rails along a corridor?

Timescales should clearly state the intended overall length of your initiative with points to stop, review and reflect. Check-in points provide opportunities to make any changes to your project based on the insight and knowledge from everyone involved.

Depending on budget, this may inform the initial scale of your initiative (your intended outcomes should remain the same). Starting with a small budget is lower risk, however, the impact achieved can still be significant.

Once your business case is approved, utilising the 'test of change' model will allow your initiative to be piloted with scope for adaptations, while building an evidence base which supports your project outcomes.

Test of change is a method used to build knowledge about what is working within your system, and why. Based on a working theory, each time a test is carried out, the predicted theory is tested and then adjusted based on the results. Starting on a manageable small scale and increasing over time, this aids in gathering more reliable data before having the confidence to scale up.



The process is neatly summarised in the [NHS Plan, Do, Study, Act report](#)

The test of change approach was used by Paths for All throughout the development phases of the walking with strength and balance programme.

The key aspects of this approach included:

- Starting small with an idea or change
- Looking for partners and participants to work with
- Seeking funding to support the new activity
- Trying out the activities
- Reviewing how it's working and gathering feedback
- Sharing evidence and results
- Developing the approach in different locations and settings

Test of change offered opportunities to involve the right people to shape activities and gather evidence before developing more widely and attracting more funding.

Action points:

Create your business case, clearly stating:

- Defined outcomes
- Benefits (organisation and people)
- Who should be involved and their role
- Where initiative could take place
- Timescales
- Budget
- Explore 'test of change' and [NHS Plan, Do, Study, Act report](#)

Partnership working

Establishing partnerships with colleagues and teams internally and externally can bring a range of additional knowledge, ideas and skills, and build support for the development and delivery of your programme.

Having a range of people and organisations involved will add authority, strength and creative problem solving, helping to ensure the project is sustainable and adaptable to different and changing environments.

Partnerships can also help leverage additional funding opportunities. For example, a third sector organisation may be more flexible and better placed to apply for grant funding.

When setting up your partnerships be clear of your project aims and expectations. Agree each partner's role and responsibilities, as well as time available, resources, funding position, skills that can be harnessed and clear lines of communication. You may wish to formalise your partnerships by creating a working group (including terms of reference) to keep focus and drive the initiative forward. It is also an opportunity to share skills and expertise, especially around communications and leadership. Management support for the initiative and working group will bring authority to suggest and make changes throughout development.

Local networks and groups could add additional expertise and interest in your project. For example, in the development of walking with strength and balance programme with care homes in Perth and Kinross, Paths for All worked with members of the Care Home Activity Network (CHAN). The forum for care home Activity Coordinators allowed them to share learning and experiences, and to prototype and gather feedback on walking with strength and balance resources.

Volunteers and wider community links, such as with schools, can also provide some additional support for people receiving care to participate in physical activity opportunities, e.g. joining in with a short walk around the garden and encouraging intergenerational conversations.

Action points:

- Identify internal and external partners for increased capacity and expertise. Think about the skills and expertise needed.
- Establish a working group to oversee the planning and implementation of your project. Agreeing a 'terms of reference' will ensure members are clear about the purpose of the group, their role, time commitment and project practicalities.
- Research existing networks that are aligned to what you are planning to do and may be interested in providing support.

Funding

Case study example:

Callander Medical Practice (NHS Forth Valley)

The first GP Medical Practice in Scotland to install a suite of external Strength and Balance panels within their grounds. The on-site physiotherapy team will promote strength and balance movements as part of a patient's treatment plan to aid in their recovery. The initiative is in partnership with local walking group, Callander Health Walk (delivered by Walk in the Park) which is led by Volunteer Walk Leaders and aims to encourage people who are inactive to join.

Callander Health Walk stop at Callander Medical Practice and encourage all participants to complete some strength and balance movements. Read the full story below:



[Medical practice strengthens its offer to patients and the community - Paths for All | Paths for All](#)



Funding will be required to support the development of your walking with strength and balance project to cover resource and training costs. In addition, consideration might be given to communications materials, changes to environments and infrastructure, and events.

If you have set up a working group, there may be existing budgets that can be drawn on to cover some of these costs. If not, then you may need to look for external funding opportunities. If the working group is established, then this should be the starting point for sourcing suitable funding streams and writing funding applications.

If you are working with external partners, e.g. from the third sector, this may increase the number of funds that can be applied to as some will have restrictions on the type and size of organisation that can apply. Third sector partners may also be better placed and have more flexibility when applying for funding.

Funding should be linked to the test of change approach when stating your case for the project. Starting with small local funds, gathering evidence of the impact your project has had and clearly stating the opportunities to develop the case for further investment. For example, increased staffing, rollout of training and resources or changes to environments such as anti-slip pathways and walking circuits with strength and balance posts and seating areas.

Action points:

- Identify what you need for your project and associated costs
- Look for suitable funding opportunities and discuss with your working group
- Start by applying for a small budget. Gather evidence of the impact and then use this for the next funding application to scale up or develop further
- If appropriate, involve patients, residents, or clients in the application process. Articulating their insights, support, and experiences around what you are trying to achieve can be invaluable in providing evidence to funders

Case study example:

Perth and Kinross Council, Angel Share Fund

The development of the Care About Walking resource is a good example of how small additional funding can support initial groundwork. Perth and Kinross Council's Angel's Share fund awarded £2,000 towards the development of the information booklet and walking chart.

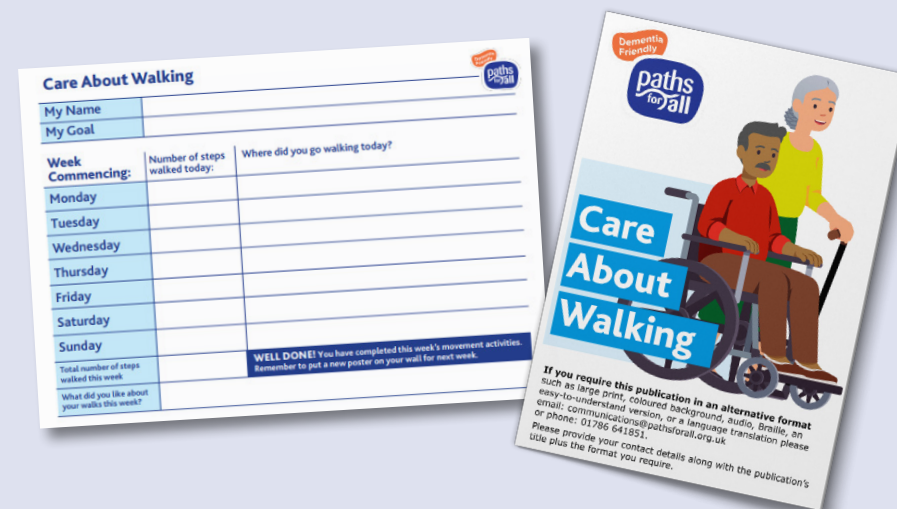
Parkdale Care Home residents and staff got involved to test out different ways to count steps and measure walking distances, such as:

- Trying out different pedometer types like watches, clips, and lanyards
- Developing walking routes with the steps counted out, e.g. from the lounge to the garden and back again
- Testing the impact of footprints on the walls and floors (residents preferred the footsteps on the floor)

The views and findings from these activities were collated/collected into the Care About Walking booklet with information and ideas to encourage people to walk. Additional supporting resources, such as motivational posters and a wall chart for recording steps and setting goals were also created.



[Care About Walking is now available nationally as a free download.](#)



Evidence the impact

A key part of the test of change process is to review your findings and evidence the impact that has been made. There will be demonstrable differences that can be highlighted which back up your initial project aim and support the outcomes stated in your project plan.

It is important to record data periodically and in response to key aspects of your plan, e.g. number of falls recorded, or number of steps being achieved. Collation of feedback from everyone involved in the project, both quantitative and qualitative, will also provide substantial evidence to support further funding aspirations or project development.

Examples of quantitative data may include number of staff trained in strength and balance, number of people receiving care who are participating in walking and strength and balance activities, reduction in number of falls or repeat falls or reduction in length of hospital stay. However you choose to capture quantitative data it should be consistent throughout the duration of your project to give accurate and measurable differences which clearly demonstrates change.

Qualitative data should aim to capture people's experiences and how they feel about particular aspects of the project. This can be from staff, residents, patients, clients and family members. Data can be recorded 'in the moment', pre-planned with specific questions or through 'prompt led' conversations. You may follow individual progress and capture interventions through 'before, during and after' questioning, or collate case studies which highlight the impact your project has made to individuals involved throughout.



[Further information on quantitative and qualitative data collection methods can be found here.](#)

Make sure you have permission to record data and collate findings from every individual in receipt of care, involved in your project. You may need written consent before you start.

Action points:

- Decide how you will evidence the impact of your project using quantitative and qualitative methods whilst you are creating your project plan
- Ensure all methods will help to evidence your project aim and outcomes
- Decide who will be responsible for collating and reviewing all the evidence
- Check if you require written consent from people in receipt of care

Next steps

Sharing what has been achieved, and understanding the impact is important if you are considering scaling up your project. To develop the project further and/or seek additional funding, identify within your working group who to share the evidence and impact with. Opportunities to highlight success and share individual stories (with permission) will also aid in strengthening the support and interest in your project.

In addition, consideration should also be given to what worked well and what didn't throughout the test of change, and what could be done differently moving forward. Reviewing who has been involved to date and the roles and responsibilities held, can help in identifying other people who should be part of the next phase of development. This may also be informed by where you would like to expand this work to, e.g. more hospital wards, other care homes, or within a specific service, such as rehabilitation teams.

Review your initial budget and the scale that this covered for the test of change pilot. Whilst also being realistic about growth and expansion of the work, consider what scale could be achieved from an increased budget. Additional resource will aid in gathering more momentum and support from a wider staffing group. It's at this stage that you should start to factor in methods of sustainability and how this might look within your setting, e.g. a cascade model of training.

When you are ready, consider what funds may be available to support this work within your organisation and if there is an opportunity to present your findings, demonstrate the impact and detail how you envisage this work to develop and expand. Alternatively, consider external funding opportunities available and work with your project team to progress applications and/or seek support from others.


Whilst this toolkit has been created to help health and social care professionals to develop their own walking with strength and balance programme, Paths for All can support conversations and offer additional expertise where required.

Action points:

- Share findings and demonstrate impact
- Highlight notable success stories (with permission)
- Review the working group and who else should be involved to scale up and expand your programme
- What funding do you need and where will this be sourced from

Get in touch

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