

# How to stay on your feet and prevent a fall.



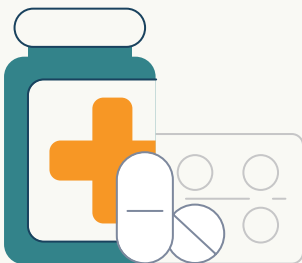
# Stay on your feet, prevent falls!

Just like everyone else, we're sure you want to stay healthy for as long as possible so you can continue to take care of yourself. However, having a fall could get in the way of this. Fortunately, you can often take action to reduce the risk of a fall. For example, you can work on your fitness, and carry out modifications in your home that can help prevent a fall. This brochure describes the things you can do.



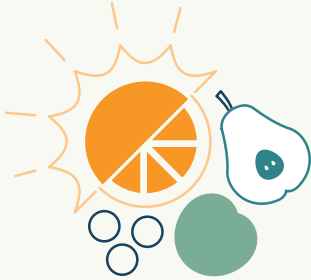
## 1 Improve your balance and muscle strength

You can do exercises aimed at improving your balance and muscle strength. This will significantly reduce your risk of falling. Read more about this on page 4.



## 2 Get your medications checked

If you take medications, you should be aware that some medicines (or combinations of medicines) can make you feel dizzy or sleepy. Alternatively, they might weaken your muscles or cause you to react more slowly than usual. These things increase your risk of falling. Read more on page 7.



### **3 Eat tasty and healthy food**

Eating tasty and healthy food provides you with the building blocks that keep your muscles strong enough. Read more about this on page 10.



### **4 Get your eyes checked**

Get your eyes checked every year by an optometrist or ophthalmologist, and follow their advice. Good vision helps to improve your balance. Read more about this on page 13.



### **5 Wear properly fitting shoes**

Did you know that your feet change as you age? Wearing properly fitting shoes reduces the risk of falling. Therefore, check your shoes to make sure they still fit you well. Read more about this on page 15.



### **6 Make your home safe**

There are things you can do to make your home much safer. Even just a couple of minor modifications can help prevent a fall. Read more about this on page 17.

# 1 Improve your balance and muscle strength



Good balance is essential, as are strong enough muscles. They help with things such as getting up from a chair, or avoiding tripping. If you have good balance and strong muscles, you will feel more confident and be less likely to fall.



## A quick test

- ☐ I exercise every day to improve my balance and train my leg muscles.
- ☐ I make sure that I don't sit for too long at a time.
- ☐ When I stand up, I pause for a moment before walking. I tense my leg muscles first, and wait until I am no longer dizzy.

## Muscle-strengthening exercises to do at home

You can also easily improve your balance and muscle strength at home. Try the simple exercises illustrated here. If you really want to get good results though, then a little challenge is important. You

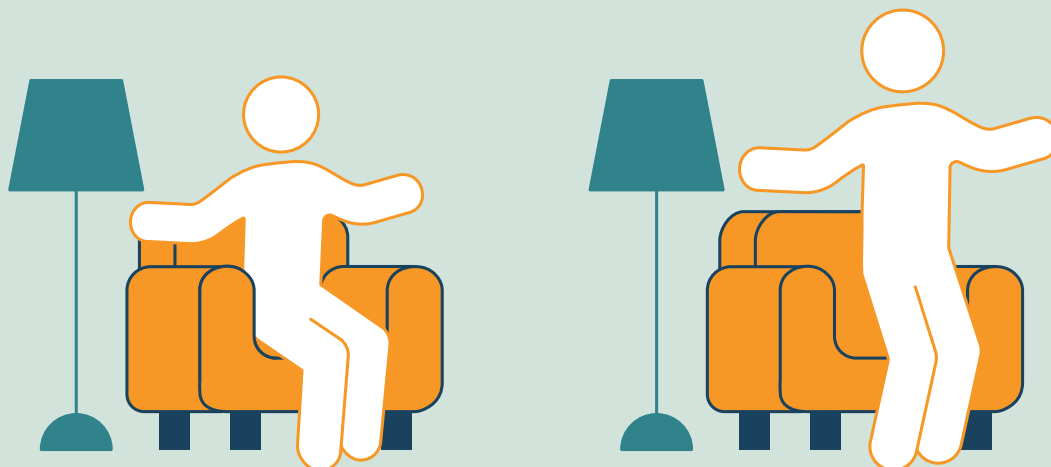
are exercising, after all. So you may feel some muscle pain after doing these exercises, but it's nothing to worry about. If you do the exercises regularly, you will notice that the muscle pain decreases.

## Exercise 1: Making way

Standing up, no hands

> 5x in a row

> 2x per day

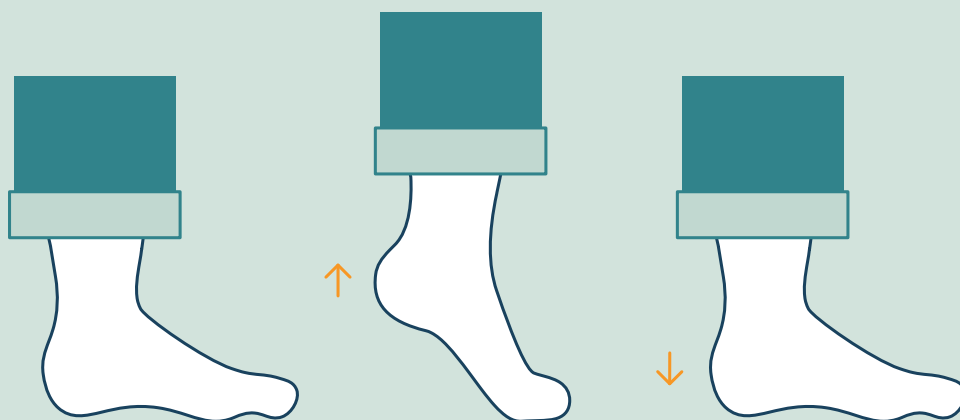


## Exercise 2: Footings

Go up on tiptoes

> 5x in a row

> while getting dressed



## Help with exercise

Perhaps you would prefer to have help with improving your balance and muscle strength. There are more and more special exercises available these days, aimed at helping older people to prevent falls. Ask your GP or physiotherapist whether there are any exercise programmes on offer

in your area for older people. These programmes are often covered by supplementary health insurance or the municipality. The following are some examples of good exercise programmes that help to reduce the risk of falling: In Balans (In Balance), Otago, and Vallen Verleden Tijd (No More Falls).



### Balance and muscle strength training tips

You can do special exercises or follow a training programme, but there are also other ways to keep yourself active enough. Here are a few tips:

- Take the stairs instead of the escalator or lift. Climbing stairs is excellent exercise for your leg muscles.
- Exercise daily in front of the TV with the 'Nederland in Beweging!' (Netherlands in motion!) programme, which appears each weekday at 9:15 a.m. on NPO2 and 10:15 a.m. on NPO1.
- Explore the beauty of your local neighbourhood. Take an extra walk around the block when you head to your usual supermarket, or get off the bus or tram at an earlier stop, and walk the rest of the way to your destination.
- Walking is good for you, but you will get the best results if you combine it with muscle-strengthening exercises.

## 2 Get your medications checked



Some medications affect blood pressure, balance or the brain. If you use a number of medications, you will be at greater risk of falling. Even if you have been taking the same medications for a long time, they might still cause you to fall.

**Important:** As you get older, medications stay in your body longer. Therefore, consult with your GP or pharmacist every year to find out whether you still need to take the medications, and if so, how much you need.



### A quick test

- ☐ I know exactly which medications I am taking.
- ☐ I know whether my medications make me more likely to fall.
- ☐ When I receive new medications, I always ask if they are safe to take with my other medications.
- ☐ Every year, I ask my GP or pharmacist to review my medications.

## Medications that may increase the risk of falls

You can request a list of all the medications you are currently taking from your pharmacy. Take a careful look at the medications listed to the right.

## When to ask for an appointment with the GP

If you are taking one or more of the medications listed on the right, then it's a good idea to consult with your GP. You should do so especially if any of the following also apply to you:

- > You occasionally feel dizzy, drowsy or weak.
- > You are afraid of falling, or are not confident about walking.
- > You have been prescribed a new medication.
- > You have had a fall in the last twelve months.

## Are you taking any of the following medication?

- ☐ Sleep or anxiety medications
- ☐ Strong painkillers such as morphine, tramadol or oxycodone
- ☐ Blood pressure medications
- ☐ Diuretic medications
- ☐ Sedatives
- ☐ Antidepressant and antimanic medications
- ☐ Antipsychotic medications and medications for delirium
- ☐ Epilepsy medications
- ☐ Heart medications

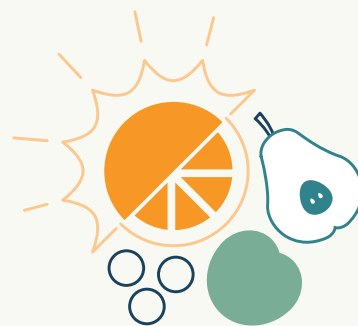




### **Tips for discussing your medications with your GP**

- Bring the most recent version of your list of medications.
- Ask your GP to explain your medications and any side effects.
- If you take several medications at once, ask if they are safe to take with each other.
- If you want to stop or cut down on a medication, ask if this is possible.

### 3 Eat tasty and nutritious food



As people age, their nutritional needs change. It is important to consume enough nutrients to help keep your bones strong, your joints flexible and maintain muscle strength. Which nutrients are important, and how much do you need?



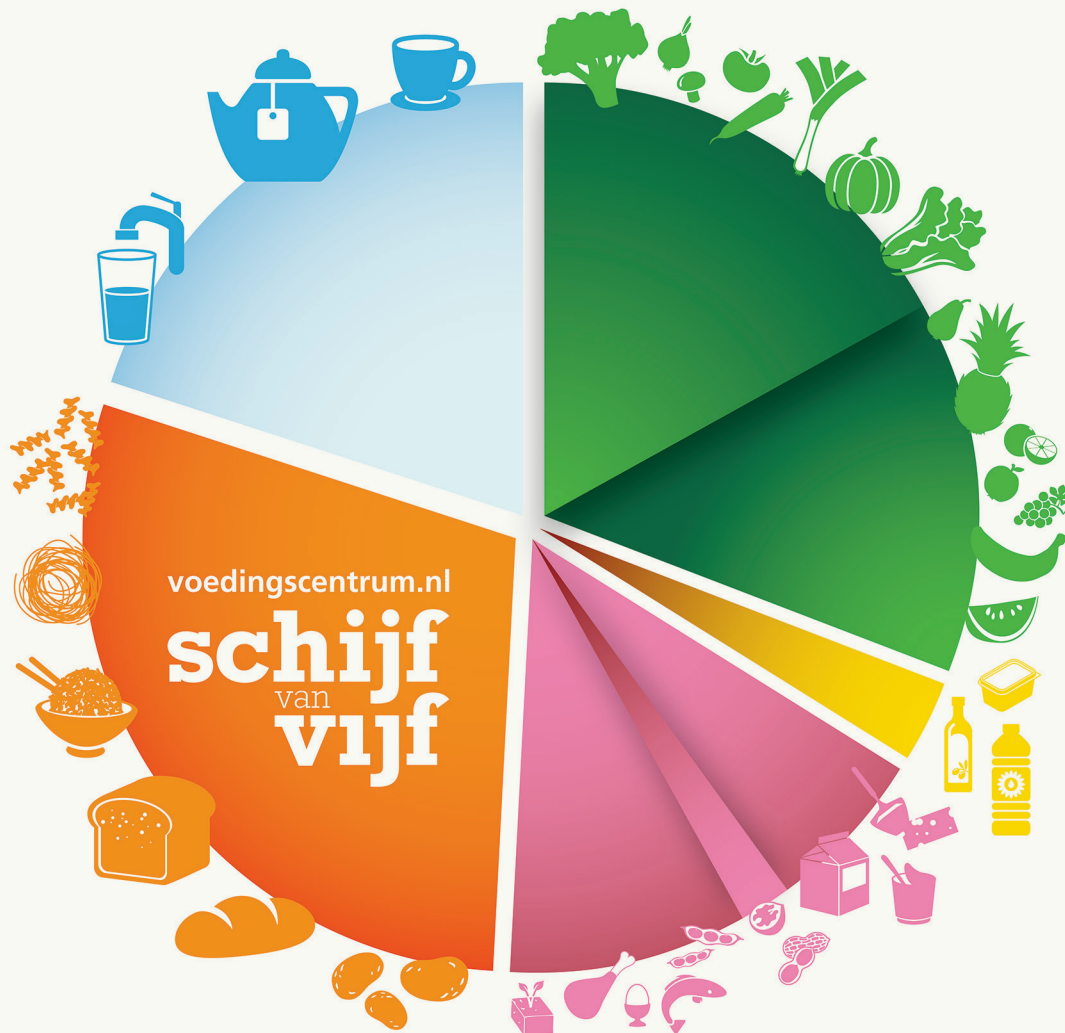
#### A quick test

- ☐ I know what vegetables, fruit and other types of food I need to eat every day.
- ☐ I make sure to eat enough proteins. I can get these from meat, fish, milk, cheese, eggs, bread, legumes and nuts.
- ☐ I know that my GP can do a test to see whether I need extra vitamin D.
- ☐ I drink enough water every day.

## What are your daily requirements?

Unfortunately, you can't prevent the loss of muscle mass, but you can slow down the process considerably by keeping active and eating enough foods that are rich in protein. You will be sure to get enough protein if you follow the amounts recommended in

the Schijf van Vijf (the Wheel of Five, setting out the recommended daily intake from the five food groups). The Voedingscentrum (Netherlands Nutrition Centre) recommends that people aged 70 years and above eat the following foods every day:





### **Tips for a satisfying and nutritious diet**

In addition to following the Schijf van Vijf, you can also do other things to eat well and maintain your weight:

- Keep your weight stable. If you lose four or more kilos in a period of six months or less without intending to (including if you are overweight), visit your GP.
- Make sure you get enough protein in your diet, because your muscle mass decreases as you get older. Proteins mainly come from milk and dairy products, cheese, fish, meat, egg and meat substitutes. They are also found in bread, cereal products, legumes and nuts.

### **Information about alcohol**

- As you get older, your body's fluid and fat percentage changes. The fluid percentage declines, and the fat percentage increases. As a result, you will get higher levels of alcohol in your body if you drink.
- In addition, your nervous system will become more sensitive to the effects of alcohol.
- The breakdown and elimination of alcohol by the stomach, liver and kidneys also slows down.
- On top of that, many older people take medications whose interaction with alcohol is not yet fully understood. Specifically, alcohol may either reduce or enhance the effect of medications.

### **Would you like more advice?**

If you need nutritional advice, then please contact a dietician. They will help you to choose the right foods to suit you and your situation.

## 4 Get your eyes checked



Being able to see properly is essential for good balance. Unfortunately, your eyesight is likely to decline as you age. To help ensure that this does not increase your risk of falling, we have listed a few tips for you below.

### **Have your eyes tested**

Is your vision still good enough? Have your eyes tested each year. For a comprehensive eye test, it is best to make an appointment with an ophthalmologist or optometrist. An ophthalmologist or optometrist will be able to detect any eye abnormalities. You do not need a referral from your GP for a visit to the optometrist, but you do need one if you want to visit an ophthalmologist.

### **Which glasses are best?**

If you are often outdoors and have fallen previously, then it's best to get distance glasses that you can use outside. Varifocal glasses are very practical for home use, but the portion of the lens for reading can make it harder to see thresholds and loose paving stones. This can result in a fall. It is also important to keep your glasses clean. This might seem overly obvious, but it is often forgotten.



### A quick test

- ☐ I clean my glasses every day.
- ☐ I make sure that there is always enough light in my home.
- ☐ I have my eyes tested every year.



### Tip

Clean your glasses at a fixed time of day. This will turn it into a daily habit.

### Help your eyes by providing enough light

As you get older, your vision declines. This means you need more light in order to see as well as children and adults younger than you. In order to see well, an 80-year-old needs three times as much light as a 25-year-old. Therefore, it is important to have enough light in your home to ensure you have good vision. This will enable you to see obstacles better and deal with them effectively.

If your street is poorly lit, or the paving is uneven or broken, then it's worth calling or writing to your municipality about it. After all, these are things that can cause falls, but are also very easily remedied. So, don't be afraid to speak up. It is important for you to feel safe and at ease, no matter where you are.

## 5 Wear properly fitting shoes



It is important to pay careful attention when choosing shoes and slippers. Effective advice and a good choice can greatly reduce the risk of falling. This section contains a number of tips.

### Good fit

Did you know that your feet gradually increase in size? This is a normal part of ageing, and you should bear it in mind if you are planning to buy shoes. However, if you notice that your feet slide around slightly in the shoe, then the shoe is too big.

Properly fitting shoes allow around one centimetre of space between the end of your big toe and the nose of the shoe. When you are standing, you should still be able to wiggle your toes upwards a little.

If you are unsure about your shoe size, then ask for help in the shoe shop. If you are planning to buy new shoes, then it's best to do so at the end of the day. Also try on both left and right shoes. Many people have feet that differ slightly in size.

## Soles and laces

Good shoes have soles that are not too smooth, so you don't slip. However, the soles are also not too stiff, so you are less likely to trip. Good soles bend slightly with the movement of the feet. If necessary, a shoemaker can put other soles on your shoes.

You will be more stable on your feet in shoes with a low heel (no higher than four centimetres). Also pay attention to the weight of your shoes; lighter shoes are both safer and more comfortable. If your laces keep coming loose, then buy some that are not as slippery. Also make sure that your laces are not too long.

## When at home

If you prefer not to wear shoes at home, then choose sturdy slippers that fit properly. They should enclose your foot snugly and have robust soles.

## Foot problems

Foot pain and foot problems such as ingrown toenails and toe deformities can make it easier for you to lose your balance and fall. If you have foot problems, then have a podiatrist treat them.



### A quick test

- ☐ My shoes are sturdy. They fit me properly and do not have a high heel.
- ☐ My slippers always fit snugly on my feet.
- ☐ I take good care of my feet, or have a pedicurist do that for me.
- ☐ If I experience pain or other problems with my feet, I call my GP or podiatrist.



## 6 Make your home safe



There are things you can do to make your home much safer, sometimes with just a couple of minor modifications. Take this list with you as you walk around your house. If you answer 'yes' to a statement, then you are doing fine. If you answer 'no', then find out what you can do to prevent a fall.

 The whole house	yes	no
I have enough lighting throughout the house.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The light switches are easy to reach.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't walk around in socks; instead I wear shoes or sturdy slippers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There are no thresholds in my house. > If you cannot remove the thresholds in your home, then ensure that they have sloping edges. This will minimise the chance of you tripping over them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel safe in my home. > Are you afraid that you might remain on the ground for a long time after a fall? If so, then wear a personal alarm button, and make sure you have it with you at all times.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cables and wires are properly secured or tucked away. > You can use cable clips or wire ducts for this. These are available from hardware shops.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My rugs and dry running mats have a good non-slip coating, or there is a non-slip mat underneath.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



## Stairs

yes

no

At night, I turn on a bright light when I use the stairs.

*> If you don't have a toilet on the same floor as your bedroom, then consider purchasing a commode. You can buy these at the home care shop.*

☐☐

There is a banister on either side of the staircase.

☐☐

My stairs have carpet that is securely fitted.

☐☐

The stairs are always clear of items, so that I don't trip.

☐☐

There are also no items or furniture at the bottom of the stairs.

*> If you fall, you might hurt yourself badly on a cabinet or the coat rack.*

☐☐

If I am wearing wide-legged trousers or a long skirt,  
I am extra careful on the stairs.

☐☐

I always have one hand free when carrying items up  
and down the stairs.

☐☐

I clean the stairs with a handheld vacuum cleaner or a mop.  
I avoid using a heavy vacuum cleaner.

☐☐

### Points for attention

---

---

---

---

---



## Bathroom & Toilet

yes

no

I can get out of my bath safely.

*> There are special supports that can be installed on the edge of the bath. These are available from the hardware shop. Alternatively, you can replace your bath with a walk-in shower.*

☐☐

After washing myself, I use a shower seat while drying off.

*> There are separate shower seats available, as well as seats that can be fixed to the wall.*

☐☐

I use a handle next to the toilet as a means of extra support when standing up.

*> Never use the toilet sink as support when standing up.*

☐☐

I have a raised height toilet.

*> You can purchase a new, raised height toilet at the hardware shop, or opt for a toilet seat raiser for use on your existing toilet. These are available from the home care shop. Both of these options make it easier for you to stand up from a sitting position.*

☐☐

The bath/shower and the bathroom floor are equipped with non-slip tiles.

*> If your tiles are too slippery, you can apply a non-slip layer or stickers. These are available from the hardware shop.*

☐☐

I have enough light to see well if I go to the toilet at night.

*> Opt for lamps with a movement or brightness sensor. You can buy these at the hardware shop. Make sure there is a source of fresh air in the bathroom and toilet. This will reduce the likelihood of you becoming unwell due to overheating.*

☐☐

The door to the toilet and bathroom can be opened from the outside.

*> Make sure that people can help you if you do fall. Don't lock the door, and consider getting a personal alarm button that you can have with you and use to call your family or an ambulance.*

☐☐



## Bedroom

yes

no

I have a high bed that I can get into and out of easily.

☐☐

*> If you have a low bed, you can buy bed raisers from the home care shop.*

I turn on the light when I get into or out of bed.

☐☐

*> A light with a sensor can be helpful, such as a sensor that reacts to movement or one that can adjust the intensity of the light.*

My slippers are stored in a safe place where I or my partner cannot trip over them.

☐☐

I always stay sitting for a moment before I get up from the bed.

☐☐

*> You can become dizzy if you stand up too quickly after lying down.*



## Telephone and unexpected visitors

yes

no

If the telephone rings, I go to answer it at an unhurried pace.

☐☐

*> Get a cordless or mobile phone that you can carry around the house with you, or install a telephone on each floor.*

If someone drops by unexpectedly and rings the doorbell,  
I walk calmly to the door.

☐☐

*> An intercom enables you to see who is at the door and to speak to them. You can also opt for a doorbell with a camera linked to your mobile phone. You can buy this kind of doorbell at the hardware shop.*



## Living room & kitchen

yes

no

My chairs and couches have high armrests so that I can stand up easily.

☐☐

When I stand up, I pause for a moment first before walking.

*> Tense your calf muscles one by one.*

☐☐

The things I use a lot are close by so I can access them right away.

☐☐

If I have to reach something that is high up, I use a sturdy household stepladder. This stepladder has a handle that I can hold on to. I do not use a chair or stool.

☐☐

There is enough space between my furniture to prevent me bumping into anything.

☐☐

I keep my floor clean.

*> The kitchen floor in particular might be slippery due to cooking fat.*

☐☐

After mopping the floor, I wait until it is completely dry.  
I do not walk on a wet floor.

☐☐

### Points for attention

---

---

---

---



## Outdoors

yes

no

I tidy up tools and garden refuse immediately.

☐☐

I keep my patio free of algae, moss and leaves.

☐☐

I have levelled any uneven paving or small steps.

☐☐

When I use my ladder, I make sure that it is sturdy and level.

*> If you are using a ladder on soft ground, put down a couple of paving stones first to create a flat, firm surface. If you are doing a major job, then use scaffolding instead.*

☐☐

I report loose paving stones or broken street lights to the municipality.

☐☐

## Proper use of walking aid

yes

no

My walker or walking frame has been properly adjusted to suit me by a professional.

☐☐

When I use my walker as a seat, I park it with the brake on.

☐☐

I have my walker checked every year.

*> It is important to have your walker checked every year. This includes checking the brakes, the folding system and the height of the handles. If the handles are too high, you will be walking with elevated shoulders, which can lead to shoulder and neck pain. If the handles are too low, then your walker will not support you adequately and you will have the wrong posture, which is bad for your back.*

☐☐

## Colophon

VeiligheidNL

Telephone +31 (0)20 - 511 45 11

info@veiligheid.nl

www.veiligheid.nl

## Disclaimer

All material and information in this brochure, in any form (texts, images, downloadable files, etc.), is the property of VeiligheidNL unless explicitly stated otherwise.

We have taken a great deal of care in compiling this brochure. However, VeiligheidNL accepts no responsibility for any inaccuracies or imperfections in this publication, nor for any accidents or injuries caused by doing the exercises. The copying, distribution and any other use of these materials is not permitted without written permission from VeiligheidNL.

## Contents

Edited by VeiligheidNL

This brochure was created in consultation with:

- Professor of Fall Prevention Dr. N. van der Velde, Amsterdam UMC location AMC
- Netherlands Nutrition Centre
- Royal Visio, Visio Accessibility
- Netherlands Association for Physiotherapy in Geriatrics
- University of Applied Sciences Utrecht – Institute for Movement Studies

©2023 VeiligheidNL

All rights reserved

## This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Name of practice:	
Address:	
Telephone:	
E-mail:	