

WHAT IS FRAILTY AND IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO PREVENT OR TREAT IT?



- People with frailty are unable to bounce back from even relatively minor injuries, illnesses or changes in their personal circumstances, for example a fall, infection, adjusting to a new medication, constipation, or urinary retention.



- As we age our bodies gradually lose their built-in reserves, making us less resilient. We often become more vulnerable to illnesses, less able to deal with illnesses when they arise, more likely to fall and in turn more dependent on others.



- Whilst frailty is more common older people, affecting 10% of people over the age of 65 and 50% of people over the age of 85, frailty can also occur earlier in life due to medical conditions or physical or mental health issues.
- As frailty increases, a person will become more vulnerable making small events such as a minor infection more difficult to recover from which in turn can have an increasingly negative impact on health and independence.
- The key to preventing frailty or reducing the risk, is to detect frailty as soon as possible, before it starts to cause problems and make small changes to slow the deterioration or lower the risk.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM FRAIL OR AT RISK OF BECOMING FRAIL?

Frailty is not always apparent and often people do not recognise themselves as frail.

Characteristics of frailty can include weight loss, poor nutrition, hydration issues, fatigue, weakness, reduced physical activity or a general slowing down

People affected by frailty may experience one or more of the following:

- **unsteadiness on their feet meaning they are more likely to fall**
- **difficulty moving around or getting up from a chair, issues with shopping, meal preparation and housework, lack of energy to complete a task and are increasing dependency on others**
- **susceptibility to illness and taking time to recover**
- **side effects associated with medicines, such as nausea, dizziness, constipation or diarrhoea, low mood**

Members of the healthcare team are being encouraged to look out for frailty and assess the risk using a range of tools, but it can be missed. If you feel you, a family member or a person you care for, is at risk of frailty, the first step is to make an appointment with the GP or health care team. They may carry out an initial assessment themselves or refer to another health care team or service for a more detailed assessment.

WHAT HAPPENS ONCE A PERSON IS IDENTIFIED AS FRAIL OR AT RISK OF FRAILTY?

You may be referred to a specialist team of professionals who can assess your health and wellbeing and develop a care plan that addresses issues of concern to you, your family and carers.

This team can be made up of several different professionals including physiotherapists, dietitians, nurses, social workers - who is involved will depend on the issues identified.

Depending on needs, a person with or at risk of frailty may:

- **receive advice on resistance exercises or activity to help strengthen muscles**
- **be given dietary advice on a nourishing diet and foods to eat, taking into account any difficulties present in eating or preparing meals. If the person affected is underweight, has lost weight or has a poor appetite, nourishing drinks or snacks between meals may be encouraged and in some cases a prescription for high protein oral nutritional supplements is provided.**
- **have a medication review pharmacist to check and see if current medications are still needed or require changing to minimise side effects**
- **meet with a social prescriber or social worker or a volunteer to develop a support network and provide help if needed to continue everyday tasks including self-care, shopping and preparing food so that the person affected can continue to live as independently as possible**

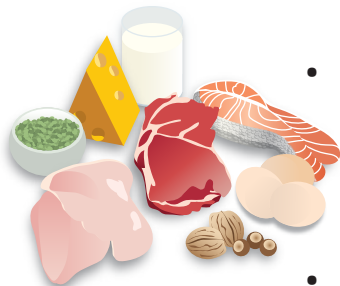


IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP MYSELF IF I AM FRAIL OR AT RISK OF FRAILTY?

There are several actions to consider to help slow or reverse frailty so you can remain as independent as possible and be resilient to illnesses and prevent falls.

- **Looking after your muscle health is key** - if you have strong muscles, they will help you to combat any ill health and prevent falls, both of which can contribute to the progression of frailty.
- **Keeping muscles healthy and strong can be influenced by what you eat and drink and activity.**

- **Eat a varied nourishing diet*** - many people who are frail are at risk of being under-nourished so ensuring that you are eating the right foods is important.



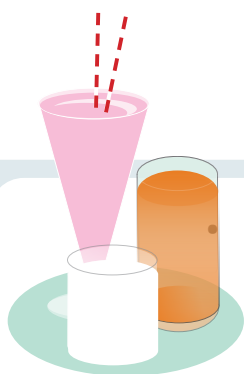
- Foods high in protein should be included in 2 or 3 meals each day. Good sources of protein include meat, fish, eggs, and dairy foods such as milk, yogurt and cheese. Plant-based sources of protein include soy and tofu, beans, pulses, nuts and seeds. A leaflet containing some protein rich food and meal ideas is available free to download at: www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/library/proteinideas.pdf
- If your appetite is poor, try eating 3 smaller meals along with snacks or milky drinks in between meals. In some cases, your healthcare professional may prescribe oral nutritional supplements to help.

More information about getting the most from your food and advice on oral nutritional supplements can be found at www.malnutritionpathway.co.uk/leaflets-patients-and-carers

**If you are on a special diet for a health condition or there is a reason why you should restrict protein (for example if you have chronic kidney disease), ask your doctor or healthcare team to refer you to a dietitian who can tailor advice to your specific needs*



- **Vitamin D** is important for bone health and helps our muscles work effectively. About half of our Vitamin D comes from diet and the remainder from the action of sunlight on the skin. Foods rich in Vitamin D include oily fish, red meat, liver, egg yolks and foods that have been fortified with Vitamin D such as some fat spreads, milks including plant-based milks and breakfast cereals almond milk.
- In the UK, a Vitamin D supplement to provide an additional 10 micrograms (10 mcg) or 400 i.u. a day is recommended October to March for everyone, and all year round for those who spend a lot of time indoors, have dark skin or cover skin up. Vitamin D supplements are available at low cost in chemists, supermarkets and online. Look for the Vitamin D3 version as this is better absorbed by the body. If your vitamin D levels are found to be very low, you may be prescribed a Vitamin D supplement



The importance of fluid - dehydration can cause low blood pressure, dizziness and confusion, which can increase the risk of falling. Try to drink at least 6 to 8 cups of fluid every day and possibly more if you are exercising or are in a warm environment. Except for alcohol, all fluids count - water, juice, milky drinks, tea and coffee.

- **Keep active** - physical activity in combination with a high protein diet is important to keep muscles strong. A mixture of balance and strength exercises are important. If you are not normally very active you should start slowly, and you may need supervision from a healthcare professional such as a physiotherapist. Over time, as you get stronger, you can aim to increase the frequency, level and length of activity.



- The NHS Live Well website: www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-older-adults/ has a number of suggested activities for strengthening muscles ranging from simple chair exercises for those who are less active to more strenuous movement and activities for those who are more physically active.