



HOME SAFE HOME

***Chances are that you, a family caregiver,
worry more about home safety
than does your loved-one.***

***The purpose of this handout is to offer some ideas to
help you adopt a “safety first” attitude, and place an
emphasis on prevention.***

See the World Through Your Loved-One’s Eyes & Understand the Limitations

Your loved one may be coping with multiple health problems - physical and emotional. Diseases, treatments, and medications can influence how well he/she can perform daily activities and solve problems. For example, because Alzheimer’s disease leads to problems with memory and vision, almost everything - an open door, a throw rug, kitchen appliance, and hot water tap - can become potentially dangerous.

Take the time to observe the limitations experienced by your loved one. With this information, you will be better able to take precautions that may effectively reduce safety risks. As Yogi Berra once said, “You can see a lot by just looking.”

Medications

Medications (and their side effects) can increase safety risks. Take the time to understand how medications affect your loved one – especially around balance and coordination. It is highly recommended you take all medications with you each time your loved one visits the doctor.

Be Patient and Slow Down

Many accidents occur when persons at-risk are rushed. In cases where there is a difficulty around bladder control (creating an urgency), a portable commode may be helpful.

Simplify Routines

Many accidents occur in the area of personal care (bathing, toileting, dressing or eating). Your loved one may avoid accidents if you help him/her simplify the routines that must be done every day. Remember to build in rest periods.

Prevent Falls

For millions of older persons, falls present a serious health risk. Fractures are the most serious health consequence of falls. In fact, falls are the leading cause of injury death. In addition, of the 200,000 persons suffering hip fractures each year, one-half remain disabled thus requiring more care. A sound fall prevention strategy will include the following:

- Check wall-to-wall carpeting for buckling. Contact a carpet installer to take out or secure any irregular areas. Tape the edges of area rugs to the floor with double-sided carpet tape. Throw rugs? Get rid of them.



- Immediately wipe up any spills on bare flooring.
- Use non-slip wax finish on floors and keep floor surfaces uncomplicated.
- Remove or rearrange lamp cords, or any low furniture to create a clear pathway with enough room to help reduce the risk of falls. Remember, when rearranging furniture, take care not to move furniture to the point where the look of the home changes. Familiarity is very important and too much change may cause confusion.
- No electric cords underneath furniture, rugs, or carpeting. Furniture resting on a cord can damage it, creating fire and shock hazards. Also, nails or staples that attach cords to baseboards can damage the cord. Use tape instead.
- Electric cords can “carry” only so much electrical load. The power rating label attached to cord explains the maximum load capacity. Power overload can cause fires.



- Floppy slippers and loose fitting clothes (like robes) must go. Also, your loved one needs to be steady on his/her feet. Select footwear with flat, broad-soled shoes. Tennis or walking shoes with good support are a good choice. Dangling shoelaces can be deadly. Choose footwear that fastens with Velcro straps.

- Keep staircases and hallways well lit and free of clutter.
- For proper lighting, change light bulbs to a higher wattage and use bulbs that have a soft light to reduce glare. Glare reducing lampshades help light bulb glare; window shades or blinds help with sunlight glare.
- It is safer to enter a lighted room than a dimly lit one. Relocate light switches so that one doesn't have to walk into, or go through, darkened areas.
- Any change in the level of the floor can be a hazard. Thresholds are often overlooked. Consider having them removed by a skilled craftsman.

Prevent Accidental Poisoning

- A locked cabinet may also be a good idea for storing medications. Dangerous substances such as cleaning supplies should be locked in a separate cabinet
- Maintain a clean refrigerator. Your loved-one may not be able to distinguish between rotten food and edible food.
- Beware of house plants; some of them may be harmful. Dispose of potentially poisonous plants, or give them away to family and friends. Call your Poison Control Center to get a list of dangerous plants.
- Destroy out-of-date medications and those which are no longer being used.



Bathroom Safety.

- Many older adults are unable to distinguish water temperature. Over 120° can cause tap water scalds. To avoid scalding, water temperature should be set at 120° F or lower, or you may install anti-scalding devices.
- Install washable, rubber-backed bathroom carpeting, or, use a nonskid mat in the bathtub or shower.
- Install grab bars by the toilet and tub, or clamp a grip handle to the side of the tub.
- Use a plasticized seat and a shower hose in the tub to allow the person to bathe while sitting.
- Replace fixed shower heads with flexible hand-held shower heads.
- Purchase a deep soap container to keep soap from falling into the tub or on the floor.
- Stick contrasting colored tape around the tub to help see its edges and depth.
- Install a contrasting colored toilet seat to help see the fixture.
- A raised toilet seat makes getting up and down from the toilet easier.
- Remove any waste baskets which may be mistakenly used as a toilet.
- Put away all electrical appliances and insert “safety plugs” into outlets.
- Always leave a night light on in the bathroom.



Kitchen Safety

- Keep sharp knives, scissors, and other potentially dangerous appliances safely stored. With some diseases, such as Alzheimer’s, the caregiver may want to hide sharp or dangerous appliances, remove and hide stove control knobs, or turn off gas or electricity directed to the stove.
- Use an electric kettle or other appliance with an automatic shut-off.
- Remove and hide sink stopper to avoid accidental overflow.
- Kitchen items used on a regular basis should be in easy reach without having to climb, bend, or upset balance.
- Towels, curtains and other things that may catch fire should be located away from the range.
- Wear clothing with short or close-fitting sleeves while cooking...or fasten sleeves with pins or elastic bands.
- Kitchen ventilation systems or range exhausts must function properly and used while cooking. Indoor air pollutants may accumulate to unhealthy levels.

- Consider adding ground default circuit interrupters (GFCIs) in kitchens and bathrooms to protect against shock. Shock protection devices will detect electrical fault and shut off electricity before serious injury or death occurs.
- Plan a place to sit while working in the kitchen. If standing for long periods of time is painful or you require the assistance of a cane or walker, sit down! Purchase a “kitchen stool” designed to allow you to sit while working in the kitchen. These stools have an adjustable height feature and three widely spaced legs with wheels that lock to give stability and mobility.
- When transporting food from kitchen to table or even from one counter to another, use a trolley cart rather than carrying a tray. Keep this trolley in the corner of the kitchen for easy access.
- A long-handled “reacher” enables one to access items on high shelves. The handle is textured for an easy grip and the end can either have a magnet attached to retrieve small metal objects, or a claw-like attachment to grab items that are hard to reach.
- Consider replacing a two-handled faucet with an easier to use single-lever faucet. Lever faucets do not require gripping or twisting and are therefore much easier to use.
- A new brand of utensils is on the market, called “OXO Good Grips.™” These products are designed to fit easily into the palm of your hand for better control and comfort. They can be found at any kitchen supply store, house-wares department, and in some grocery stores. There are an endless number of items available ranging from basic utensils (i.e., forks, knives, vegetable peelers, spatulas) to cooking items (non-slip mixing bowl, flour sifter) to kitchen appliances (“easy on the wrist” tea kettle).

Bedroom Safety



- Close closet doors and dresser drawers when not in use.
 - Lamp, glasses, phone and emergency information should be within easy reach of the bed.
 - Adjust the height of the bed so your loved-one can get in and out easily.
 - Avoid tucking in electric blankets.
 - Never go to sleep with an “on” heating pad because it can cause serious burns even at relatively low settings.
- Install cordless battery-operated lights inside closets and cabinets; motion-sensitive lighting is also effective.

Exercise Can Make a Difference For You and Your Loved One

Regular exercise improves balance and coordination, increases muscle tone, increases strength, and improves bone mass and flexibility, not to mention helps one feel better. It’s best to check with the doctor or physical therapist to plan a suitable exercise program.

Other Safety and Security Measures

- Any outlets or switches that are unusually warm or hot to the touch may indicate unsafe wiring.
- Heaters with three-pronged plugs should be used in a 3-hole outlet. Never alter the grounding feature. Heaters should be placed where they can't be knocked over, and also away from flammable materials.
- Use different colors to create contrasts. Paint doorsills a different color to prevent tripping; use reflective tape at the top and bottom of the stairs; apply color decals to glass doors and large windows; create color contrasts between walls and floors; lighter colored floor surfaces are preferable. Color-code controls on the stove, clothes washer or other appliances.
- Glass tables are dangerous. Replace with sturdy wooden tables that have rounded edges.
- Encourage your loved-one to get up slowly after eating, sitting or lying down. Low blood pressure may cause dizziness at these times. Also, this allows time to adjust balance before walking.
- Limit intake of alcohol. Even a small amount can disturb already impaired balance and reflexes.
- Nighttime temperature in the house should be at least 65° F. Prolonged exposure to cold may cause a drop in body temperature, which in turn may lead to dizziness and falling.
- Purchase new rugs with slip-resistant backing. Check rugs and mats periodically to see if the backing needs to be replaced. For "regular" rugs, rubber matting under rugs can be cut to the proper size.
- Supply good lighting where medications are stored.
- Stair handrails/banisters should be securely fastened on both sides of the stairwell and be 'gripable' (thin enough to hold, and 1-3" from the wall). They should extend beyond the last step and turn inward to signal the last step has been reached.
- Observe how your loved-one uses assistive devices. Walking sticks, four-legged canes and wheel chairs may create additional risks. Walking sticks must have soft rubber tips.
- Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on each floor. They should be installed away from air vents, and the grillwork should be vacuumed regularly. Develop a schedule to test them on a routine basis.
- Consider asking neighbors and friends to drop by on a regular basis.
- Adjust the height of chairs and couches so your loved one can get in and out easily.
- Regularly scheduled vision exams are recommended!



Create Emergency Plans



- Have an emergency plan and an alternative emergency exit route in case of fire. Choose a meeting place outside of your home so you can be sure everyone is capable of escape quickly and safely.
 - Have a working fire extinguisher and basic first aid kit with bandages and antiseptic readily available.
 - Emergency phone numbers (police, fire departments, hospitals, Poison Control Center, etc.) should be kept near each phone.
-
- An emergency plan may also include the use of electronic devices such as emergency response systems, lifelines, or others.
 - Consider having additional phones in high-risk areas such as the bathroom, living room, and bedroom. The phones should be placed at a height level where, if there is a fall, your loved one can reach it.

For more information, visit these websites:

Sample of Falls Prevention Checklists: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/falls/default.htm>

Tool Kit to Prevent Senior Falls: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/toolkit/toolkit.htm>

Colorado St. University Cooperative Extension:
<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/consumer/10242.html>

Loyola University Health System: <http://www.luhs.org/depts/injprev/Falls/adult.htm>

National Resource Center on Aging and Injury: http://www.nrcai.org/news_programs.cfm

Temple University Fall Prevent Project: http://www.temple.edu/older_adult/CIOEng.htm

National Safety Council: <http://www.nsc.org/issues/fallstop.htm>