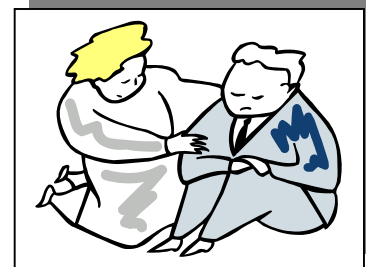


FAMILY CAREGIVERS! TAKE CHARGE TO MAKE HOME A SAFE HOME

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 and 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, 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.

Medications

Medications (and their side effects) can increase safety risks. Take the time to understand how medications affect your loved one. 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.

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 them simplify the routines they must do every day.




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! Please!
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ 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 free of clutter and well lit.
- ◆ 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 houseplants, 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.
- 




Bathroom Safety

- ◆ Many older adults are unable to distinguish water temperature. To avoid scalding, dial down the temperature setting on the hot water heater or install anti-scalding devices.
- ◆ Use a nonskid mat in the bathtub or shower.
- ◆ Install washable, rubber-backed bathroom carpeting.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ 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 wastebaskets that 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.

Bedroom Safety

- ◆ Close closet doors and dresser drawers when not in use.
 - ◆ A 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.
- 




Exercise Can Make a Difference For You and Your Loved One

Regular exercise improves balance and coordination, increases muscle tone, increases strength, improves bone mass and flexibility, not to mention helps one feel better. It's best to check with the doctor before starting an exercise routine.

Other Safety and Security Measures

- ◆ Regularly scheduled vision exams are recommended!
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Glass tables are dangerous. Replace with sturdy wooden tables with rounded edges.
- ◆ Encourage your loved-one to get up slowly after sitting. This allows time to adjust balance before walking.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors; 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.

Create Emergency Plans

- ◆ 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.
- 



For more information visit these websites:

Center for Disease Control & Prevention:

Sample of Falls Prevention Checklists: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/fallsFallPrev4.pdf>
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>

HealthAtoZ.com (preventing falls in the elderly):

<http://www.healthatoz.com/atoz/Osteo/osfalls.html>

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

Ohio State University Extension – Senior Series: <http://ohioline.osu.edu/ss-fact/index.html>

National Resource Center on Aging and Injury: <http://www.nrcai.org/>

Temple University Fall Prevent Project:

http://www.temple.edu/older_adult/CIOEng.htm

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

