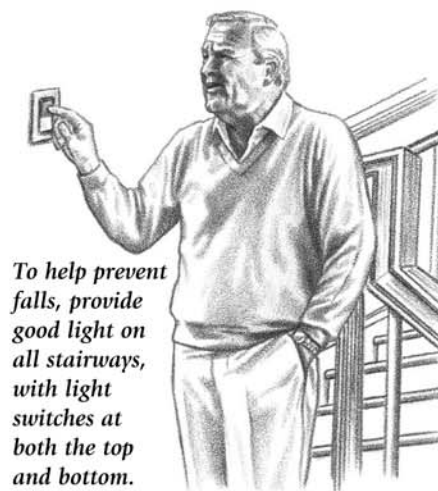


Elder Care at Home

Caring for older people at home, especially those who may be infirm, bedridden or stroke or Alzheimer's sufferers, requires special safety precautions. Poor eyesight and hearing, arthritis and the side effects of medication are other factors that can make older people more prone to accidents. Here are some guidelines for making your home safe for seniors.

Safety From Falls

Falls are the most common accidents in the home. They can be prevented by providing good light on all stairways, with light switches at both the top and bottom. Older adults may need three times more light than



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younger adults to see adequately. Provide bedside lights, night lights or remote control switches to avoid elders having to get around in the dark. Provide grab bars on bathroom walls, especially by the toilet, in the shower and on the bathtub, and sturdy handrails on stairs. Use nonskid strips or mats in bathtubs and nonskid treads on stairs. Avoid throw rugs that might slip, and keep carpets and outdoor steps and walkways in good repair. Tack down or anchor slippery rugs. Keep electrical and telephone cords away from where people walk and out from beneath furniture and rugs, but don't nail or staple cords to walls or baseboards. Put everyday items in easy-to-reach locations and examine outdoor areas to make sure they're safe and clutter-free.

Avoiding Fires and Burns

A second major cause of accidents in the home is burns. Never allow smoking in bed or when drowsy. Don't let anyone wear loose, flammable clothing when cooking. Avoid scalding by keeping your water heater at a moderate setting, no more than 120° F (48.9° C). Plan an emergency escape route in case of fire. Keep smoke detectors in good working order in your house. Also keep gas appliances clean and in good working order. Ask the local gas company to check your house for leaks. Don't set electric blankets too high and don't allow anything on top of them while they're on, not even other blankets. Never go to sleep with a heating pad that's turned on.

Replace any frayed or cracked electrical cords and don't overload even new-looking cords with more appliances than their rated load allows. Use a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) for any outlets in wet or damp areas. Always use the grounding plug on three-pronged plugs. Make sure light bulbs are the appropriate size and type for the lamp or fixture. If you don't know what the appropriate size should be, use a bulb no larger than 60 watts. For those who need more light, bring in more lamps or get one with a higher wattage. Keep space heaters where they can't be knocked over, away from furnishings, curtains and rugs and in a room with a window slightly open for ventilation.

Avoiding Confusion With Medications

Make sure all medications are clearly and accurately labeled, preferably in their original containers. Each label should include the contents, the

doctor's instructions, the expiration date and the patient's name. Throw all outdated medicines away. Make sure the person taking the medication knows the purpose of each pill as well as the dosage, frequency, whether it should be taken before, during or after meals, whether it can be taken with other medicines or foods and whether it needs to be refrigerated or has other storage requirements.

When You're Not Around

Older adults can join an emergency response system (ERS), which can bring help quickly if an accident occurs in the home while a caregiver is away. These are available commercially through alarm companies, and through hospitals or other community and social service agencies. All emergency telephone numbers should also be on or near the telephone in easy-to-read print. To guard your security, keep a telephone by your bed and keep doors and windows securely locked and entryways well lit. Never open the door to a stranger. Report suspicious behavior in your neighborhood. Get to know your neighbors and make a habit of looking out for one another.

Modify the existing home to accommodate special needs—for instance, by providing a wheelchair ramp. Provide special equipment designed to make life easier, such as special toothbrushes, hairbrushes designed for people with arthritis, amplifiers for telephones and TVs, and step stools with handrails. Call the local senior citizens' center, agency on aging or your city's housing department to find a trustworthy home repair agency. Some services are even free, especially for low-income people.