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Expert Information from Healthcare Professionals Who Specialize in the Care of Older Adults

Home Safety Tips for Older Adults

With a growing number of older adults living independently, it's increasingly important to make sure that they're safe at home. Falls, burns, and poisonings are among the most common accidents involving older people. Older adults who live alone may also become the victims of criminals who target older people. If you're an older adult living on your own, or care for an older person living alone, here's what you need to do to stay safe.

KEEP EMERGENCY NUMBERS HANDY

Always keep a list of emergency numbers by each phone. Write this information in large enough print that you can read it easily if you are in a hurry or frightened. Be sure to list numbers for:

- 911
- Poison Control: 1-800-222-1222
- Family member or friend to call in case of emergency
- Healthcare provider's office

PREVENT FALLS

- If you have difficulty with walking or balance, or have fallen in the past year, talk to your healthcare provider about having a special falls risk assessment.
- Ask your provider if you would benefit from an exercise program to prevent falls.
- If you have fallen before, think about buying a special alarm that you wear as a bracelet or necklace. Then, if you fall and can't get to the phone, you can push a button on the alarm that will call emergency services for you.
- Don't rush to answer the phone. Many people fall trying to answer the phone. Either carry a cordless or cell phone or let an answering machine pick up.
- When walking on smooth floors, wear non-slip footwear, such as slippers with rubber/no-slip bottoms or flat, thin-soled shoes that fit well.
- If you have a cane or a walker, use it at all times instead of holding onto walls and furniture.

SAFETY-PROOF YOUR HOME

- Make sure all hallways, stairs, and paths are well lit and clear of objects such as books or shoes.
- Use rails and banisters when going up and down the stairs. Never place scatter rugs at the bottom or top of stairs.
- Tape all area rugs to the floor so they do not move when you walk on them.

PROTECT AGAINST FIRE AND RELATED DANGERS

- If there is a fire in your home, don't try to put it out. Leave and call 911. Know at least two ways to get out of your apartment or home.
- When you're cooking, don't wear loose clothes or clothes with long sleeves
- Replace appliances that have fraying or damaged electrical cords.
- Don't put too many electric cords into one socket or extension cord.
- Install a smoke detector and replace the battery twice a year.
- Never smoke in bed or leave candles burning, even for a short time, in an empty room.
- Make sure heaters are at least 3 feet away from anything that can burn, such as curtains, bedding, or furniture. Turn off space heaters when you leave the room.

AVOID BATHROOM HAZARDS

- Set the thermostat on the water heater no higher than 120°F to prevent scalding.
- Have grab bars installed in the shower and near the toilet to make getting around easier and safer.
- Put rubber mats in the bathtub to prevent slipping.
- If you are having a hard time getting in and out of your tub, or on and off the toilet, ask your provider to help you get a special tub chair or bench or raised toilet seat.

PREVENT POISONING

Carbon Monoxide

- Never try to heat your home with your stove, oven, or grill since these can give off carbon monoxide—a deadly gas that you cannot see or smell.
- Make sure there is a carbon monoxide detector near all bedrooms, and be sure to test and replace the battery twice a year.

Medications

- Keep all medications in their original containers so you don't mix up medicines.
- Ask your pharmacist to put large-print labels on your medications to make them easier to read.
- Take your medications in a well-lit room, so you can see the labels.
- Bring all of your pill bottles with you to your healthcare provider's appointments so he or she can look at them and make sure you are taking them correctly.

Cleaning products

- Never mix bleach, ammonia, or other cleaning liquids together when you are cleaning. When mixed, cleaning liquids can create deadly gases.

PROTECT AGAINST ABUSE

- Keep your windows and doors locked at all times.
- Never let a stranger into your home when you are there alone.
- Talk over offers made by telephone salespeople with a friend or family member.
- Always ask for written information about any offers, prizes, or charities and wait to respond until you have reviewed the information thoroughly.
- Do not let yourself be pressured into making purchases, signing contracts, or making donations. It is never rude to wait and discuss the plans with a family member or friend.

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DISCLAIMER: This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other healthcare provider. Always consult your healthcare provider about your medications, symptoms, and health problems. February 2016

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