



## HOW TO STAY SAFE

No matter how old you are, there's no place more important to keep safe than your home. Last year, more than one million people 65 years and older were treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries associated with accidents in the home.

Frequently, accidents occur because of lack of maintenance. Take a walk through your home, and use the following checklist to spot possible safety hazards. If you see a potential problem, take the appropriate action, or ask for assistance, to fix it as quickly as possible.

### Fire Safety

- Do an audit of your home's smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguishers:
  - Check placement: Smoke rises, so smoke alarms should be located on a ceiling or high on a wall
  - Alarms mounted on the ceiling should be at least four inches away from the nearest wall and those mounted on walls should be four to twelve inches down from the ceiling
  - Test your alarms and be sure that they can be heard in bedrooms even when the doors are closed. If not, install smoke alarms in the bedrooms.
  - Replace alarms that are older than 10 years and replace any alarm that has been painted over
  - Replace batteries once per year
- Install carbon monoxide detectors. Follow the same instructions for checking alarms as stated above for smoke alarms.
- Make fire extinguishers handy
  - Be sure you have at least one Underwriters Laboratory (UL) listed fire extinguisher in your home
  - An ABC-type extinguisher is a good all-purpose choice for fires in the home
  - Be sure fire extinguishers are in easily accessible locations
    - Remember that fire extinguishers are not designed to fight large or spreading fires. If the fire is small and contained and the room is not filled with smoke, get everyone out and call the fire department. Only then, should you use a fire extinguisher to control the fire.
- Have an escape plan and a way to get out safely. Make sure everyone in the household knows it
- Avoid overloading sockets and cords. Do a walk-through of your home
  - If you see sockets with too many cords plugged in or too many extension cords around the house, it may be time to have extra outlets installed by a professional
  - Look for extension cords that are "tacked up" or run under a rug. If more than one cord is plugged into each other, this could pose a serious fire hazard
  - Check for overloaded power strips, particularly around an entertainment system or computer system. Purchase additional strips if needed

## **HOW TO STAY SAFE (continued)**

- Know about Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs). GFCIs are devices that shut off an electric circuit when it detects that current is flowing along an unintended path, possibly through water or a person. They are the small buttons labeled “Reset” and “Test” located at some outlets in your home. Their purpose is to reduce the risk of electrical shock
  - Test your GFCI outlets once a month to verify they are working properly
  - To properly test GFCIs in your home
    - Push the “Reset” button located on the GFCI outlet to assure normal operation
    - Plug a nightlight (with an “ON/OFF” switch) or other product (such as a lamp) into the GFCI receptacle and turn the product “ON”
    - Push the “Test” button located on the GFCI receptacle. The nightlight or other product should go “OFF”
    - Push the “Reset” button, again. The light or other product should go “ON” again
    - If a GFCI is not working properly, call a qualified, certified electrician who can assess the situation, rewire the GFCI if necessary or replace the device
    - Check fuse and breaker boxes for possible malfunction, shock and fire hazards

### **Safe Oxygen Usage**

Treat your oxygen like any other medication. Don’t stop or start without instructions and do not change amount unless directed. Additionally: Do NOT smoke or allow others to smoke in the room where oxygen is used or stored.

- Store oxygen away from heat, direct sunlight or pilot lights
- Do NOT use oxygen near an open flame such as a gas stove or fireplace
- Always store oxygen cylinders so they will not tip over. Keep them in canisters or lying on floor
- Be careful when using electric appliances near oxygen
- Do NOT use petroleum-based products (such as Vaseline) when wearing oxygen

### **Kitchen Safety**

- Kitchen cabinets should be low enough for a person to reach everything needed or things should be moved to lower shelves or cabinets to avoid excessive reaching and/or climbing
- If climbing is necessary, a sturdy step stool or small step ladder built for this purpose should be easily accessible



## HOW TO STAY SAFE (continued)

### Bathroom Safety

- Grab bars should be installed by toilets and in bathtubs. A grab bar may be needed on the wall outside the bathtub to help the patient get in and out
- Sink and tub faucets should be a single lever for temperature adjustment
- In the tub, non-skid mats or shower floor strips should be used to prevent slips and falls
- All outlets should be equipped with GFCIs (ground fault circuit interrupters)
- Place all electronics far away from water sources when not in use. Unplug hair dryers, electric razors and curling irons and place them in a cabinet or drawer
- Keep the floor free of trip hazards, such as plants and knickknacks

### Bedroom Safety

- Bedrooms should have a lamp or flashlight near the bed
- A small nightstand can be used for a phone, glasses, a nighttime drink and a list of important numbers
- Bedrooms should have a chair so the patient can sit down to dress
- The bedroom should be located on the first floor (unless the bathroom is located upstairs), if possible, so that the patient does not have to waste energy by going up and down stairs
- Keep the path to the door unobstructed to avoid falls
- Walking equipment (canes, walkers) should be kept next to the bed in case the patient needs to get up during the night

### Living Room Safety

- Arrange furniture so there is a clear, unobstructed path to walk safely and easily
- Remove any and all objects from the floor, including electrical cords in the pathway

### General Safety

- Emergency phone numbers should be close to a phone and the names and numbers should be large enough for someone who needs glasses to read. Pre-program the numbers into your home or cell phone if possible
- Carry a cell phone or cordless phone with you in case of a fall and you are hurt and/or unable to get up on your own. You can also contract with an agency for an emergency service to assist you in case of a fall
- Avoid using throw rugs. They can cause your feet to get caught up and trip and fall
- All stairways and halls should be maintained with handrails and lights with easy-to-access light switches. Use night lights throughout your home to keep dark areas lit (kitchens, bathrooms, bedrooms, hallways)
- Windows should be easy to open, but have secure locking mechanisms
- Doors should have lever handles and secure locks
- Water heater temperature controls should be set no higher than 120 degrees F



### **HOW TO STAY SAFE (continued)**

- Garages should have a garage door that is easy to open and should have at least one window for ventilation
- During winter, de-icing materials should be used to melt ice and snow
- Basements should have adequate lighting and safe handrails on stairs
- Outdoor steps: Make sure steps are even and balanced, not crumbling and not too high. Check that the threshold is low enough for easy access
- If the home has a yard, check it regularly for concealed holes or unsafe areas. Check for proper ventilation and make sure flammable liquids are stored properly