

The National Safety Council estimates that well over 20,000 accidental deaths occur each year in the home, in addition to over 3 million disabling injuries. The threat of home accidents becomes even greater when our mobility, strength and vision or perception decline. That's why we need to be aware of unsafe situations and correct them as quickly as possible. The purpose of this information is to not only help make your home a safer place in which to live, but one that is more accessible based on your level of mobility. We have chosen areas and situations within the home where most accidents occur. Use this as a checklist to uncover and correct unsafe situations. And remember, your home health care representative will be happy to provide recommendations as to how your home can be made safer and more accessible.

## Safety in the Bathroom

The bathroom tends to be the most dangerous room in a house. Wet surfaces combined with hard surfaces increase the danger of a disabling fall. By making a few simple modifications, the safety, as well as the accessibility of your bathroom, can be greatly improved.

### Floor

Cover the floor with carpet or with non-slip rugs to prevent falls due to wet, slippery floor surfaces. Do not leave towels, washcloths or clothing on the floor.

### Tub & Shower

Install abrasive, non-slip strips or mats on the bottom of the tub. Have grab bars installed on the walls. If weak or hand-capped, use a bath or shower chair and install a flex hose with shower nozzle for greater safety and convenience. Do not hesitate to ask for bathing assistance; compromising modesty is far preferable to risking a serious injury.

### Toilet

If necessary, install an elevated toilet seat and support frame. This enables weak or arthritic patients to transfer with

greater ease to and from the toilet. Drop-arm commodes are also available for wheelchair or non-ambulatory patients.

### Medicine Cabinet

Keep all poisons out of your medicine cabinet! Never guess. Always read medicine labels under adequate lighting before taking that medication. Do not keep old medication; dispose of it safely.

## Safety in the Bedroom

### Creating a Cheerful Atmosphere

When patients must be confined for a good part of their day to the bedroom, creating a cheerful and safe environment is most important. Choose lighter colors for walls. A generous use of flowers and plants helps carry a little of the outside in. Keep shades and drapes open to permit as much sunlight as possible into the room. Position favorite pictures and family photographs close enough to be easily visible.

### Access to Needed Objects

Position items such as the telephone, light switches, reading materials, and snacks and beverages within easy reach. If required, always keep a bell or other alarm device not only near the bed, but also tied by a string so it cannot be inadvertently dropped.

### Walking Hazards

Remove any potential hazards, such as throw rugs, loose carpet, electrical cords, extended tables or chairs, scattered towels or clothing, and anything that may cause the patient to slip or lose balance when walking to and from the bathroom or other rooms in the house.

### Smoking

NEVER smoke in bed, and NEVER smoke in the presence of oxygen equipment.

### Lighting

Inadequate lighting usually causes bedroom falls. Install night lights in the bedroom area to prevent accidental falls.

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## For Weak, Restricted or Bedridden Patients

### Hospital-type Bed

Use an adjustable hospital-type bed (either manually or electrically operated) to allow bedridden patients to change position for comfort or for entertainment, exercise or to eat.

Over-the-bed tables provide a reading, writing or eating surface, while trapeze bars enable the patient to change position, exercise or assist the patient in moving in or out of bed. Use of side rails protects the patient from possible falls.

### Commodes

A variety of bedside commodes are available to assist the patient who is unable to use the bathroom facilities.

### Bed Pressure Prevention

Bedridden patients are very susceptible to sores created by constant bed pressure. Special flotation mattresses or alternating pressure pads improve comfort and prevent pressure sores (decubitus ulcers) from forming.

## Safety in the Kitchen

Whether you prepare all, or just some of your meals, simple modifications can be made to your kitchen area that will make it safer and more accessible.

### Locating Commonly Used Items

Those kitchen utensils used most frequently should be stored in locations that require minimal reach. Standing on stools or chairs is dangerous for strong, healthy people. It can be disastrous for those weakened by age or illness. Also, bending over to enter lower cabinets can create dizziness that may result in an accidental fall.

Use shelving and pegboard for utensils within easy reach. By removing shelves and doors from under the sink area, you can work at and around the sink using a castered, height-adjustable chair.

### Safety Hints

Keep a fire extinguisher mounted near the stove. Wipe up grease, water and bits of food immediately, if spilled. Always use padded mittens on hot pans to prevent burns. Use two hands to lift pans that are heavy or bulky.

## Stairway Safety

### Indoor Steps

The most serious fall-related accidents in the home occur on stairways. And as with many safety factors, the potential for injury increases significantly when the patient is weak or partially incapacitated. The following outlines ways to make stairways safer for you.

- Provide a strong, secure handrail for stairways of 3 or more steps.
- Cover each step with a non-slip surface (abrasive strips or carpeting), securely fastened.
- Do not use small or loose rugs at the head or foot of a stairway.
- Keep stairways free of boxes, brooms, tools and so on to prevent tripping.
- Have adequate lighting on the stairway, controllable from both ends.

**Note:** Should stairs become an insurmountable problem, an electric stair lift can be installed to move you safely and comfortably up and down indoor stairs.

### Outdoor Steps

Use handrails, non-slip surfaces and adequate lighting for outdoor steps. Remember to keep outdoor steps and sidewalks free of snow and ice.

## Ramps

Ramps provide easier, safer access or even independent mobility to patients who depend on ambulatory devices, such as walkers and motorized scooters. Ramps are available, ready-made, in many areas; or can be constructed using wood, metal or even concrete. For safe use, without assistance, the incline of a ramp must be limited. For each 1-foot rise in elevation the length of the ramp should be approximately 10 to 11 feet. Ramps should include handrails or side guards for assistance and safety.

## Electrical Hazard Precautions

Keep all electrical devices at least an arm's length from sinks, tubs or showers, the stove or other grounded objects. Do not touch medical or any electrical devices with wet hands or when standing on a wet floor. Replace any electrical wire that is worn or frayed. Do not use extension cords if at all possible. When you do, use only UA approved extension cords, making certain they have adequate wire size for the load they carry. Keep all cords out from under rugs, doors and moveable furniture.