

Eliminate Hazards in Your Home: A Safety Checklist with Recommendations

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Home Safety Checklist

Introduction

Each year, many older adults suffer accidental injuries in and around the home or are victims of crime in their home. Falls, fires, or burglaries can result in substantial injury or even death. In 2004, accidents or unintentional injuries were the 5th leading cause of death in the US after heart attack, cancer, stroke and lower respiratory diseases. As the population ages, problems with walking, balance, vision and thinking increase the risk of falls and other accidents in the home. A home safety assessment is an intervention targeted at maximizing a person's function and their ability to live safely and independently in the community.

This checklist has been developed by the geriatrics faculty at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine to be completed during a home safety assessment. The questions on this checklist evaluate various aspects of safety in and around the home. For each potential safety hazard identified, one or more recommendations are provided, many of which can be accomplished with little or no cost.

Entrance

Q. Are the walkways and other pathways around the house even?

Repair the uneven surface

Q. Are the walkways and other pathways free of clutter?

Remove the clutter

Q. Is there adequate lighting near home entrances?

Consider having a handyman or electrician install a light fixture near home entrances

Stairs and Steps

Q. Are there objects such as papers, shoes, books, or other clutter on the steps?

Always keep the stairs clear by removing and storing items elsewhere

Q. Are some steps broken, uneven, or slippery?

Fix loose or uneven steps

Attach non-slip rubber treads to the steps

Q. Has the carpet on the steps become loose or torn?

Fix any areas of carpet that are worn or not firmly attached to the steps

Q. Are the edges of the steps clearly visible?

- Install bright-colored adhesive strips on the front edges of each step
- Q. Is there a sturdy and well attached handrail on both sides of the stairs?**
- Repair any loose handrails or install new ones
- Make sure all handrails are as long as the stairs
- Consider installing a second handrail on the other side of the stairs
- Q. Does the stairway have adequate lighting with light fixtures and light switches at the top and bottom?**
- Replace burned out light bulbs
- Consider having a handyman or electrician install light fixtures and/or light switches at both the top and bottom of the stairs

All Living Areas

- Q. Do tables or other furniture have sharp edges?**
- Arrange furniture so sharp edges do not protrude into the walkway
- Consider replacing rectangular shaped tables with round tables
- Q. Do you have to walk around furniture within rooms or when you walk from room to room?**
- Rearrange the furniture so the walkways are open
- Consider removing, replacing, or donating furniture that is bulky or used infrequently
- Q. Do you have to avoid electrical wires or telephone cords when you walk around your home?**
- Attach cords and wires to a nearby wall
- Use a mat especially designed to cover or secure electric wires or telephone cords (do not cover wires or cords with rugs or carpets)
- Consider having an electrician install extra outlets so electric wires do not cross the walking path
- Q. Do you have more than 2 electric wires plugged into any outlets?**
- Always use a safety-rated power strip to plug in more than 2 cords
- Consider having an electrician install extra outlets where needed
- Q. Are the flooring and floor coverings safe (no uneven or slippery surfaces, no deep pile carpets)**
- Avoid highly waxed floors
- Secure all carpeting

- Consider buying new carpets with short, dense pile
- Wear low-heeled shoes with soles that have good traction
- Q. Do you use throw rugs in your home?**
- Where possible, remove the rugs; where a rug is needed, secure it using double-sided tape or use a rug with a non-slip backing
- Q. Are there objects such as papers, magazines, shoes, books, or other clutter on the floor?**
- Always keep the floor clear by removing and storing items elsewhere; store frequently used items at an easy to reach level
- Q. Do chairs have armrests, good back support, and comfortable height for sitting?**
- Consider replacing chairs that are too low, that do not have armrests and are not supportive
- Q. Is there ample lighting in all areas, are light bulbs working, and are light switches readily accessible?**
- Replace burned out light bulbs
- Consider having an electrician install additional light fixtures and light switches where needed

Kitchen

- Q. Are dishes you use often stored on high shelves?**
- Rearrange your dishes so that items you use often are within easy reach
- Q. Do you use a steady and sturdy stool to reach upper shelves?**
- Get a steady and sturdy step stool with a bar to hold on to
- Never stand on a chair to reach upper shelves
- Q. Are the control knobs for the stove clearly marked and legible, and in front of the stove?**
- Replace knobs if the writing has worn off
- If you are considering a new stove, buy one with the knobs that are not directly behind the burners and/or one with knobs that can be disabled to prevent use by a child or unqualified adult
- Q. Is there adequate ventilation?**
- Use a ventilation fan or open windows while cooking

Fire and Burn Prevention

Q. Do you have a fire extinguisher near the kitchen exit?

Install a fire extinguisher near the kitchen exit

Q. Do you have a smoke alarm close to the kitchen?

Have a smoke alarm installed outside but near the kitchen

Q. Do you check your smoke alarm regularly to see if it works?

Test it at least twice a year and check the batteries monthly

Q. Do you have a carbon monoxide detector?

Consider installing a carbon monoxide detector near each of the bedrooms

Q. Has your family discussed and agreed upon a fire escape plan?

Develop and practice a fire escape plan with your family

Q. Is your water temperature at or below 120°?

Lower the setting on your hot water heater to "Low" or 120 degrees

Sleeping Areas

Q. Is there an easy to reach light or light switch near the bed?

Keep a lamp close to the bed within easy reach

Consider installing a light switch close to the bed

Q. Do you have a telephone near the bed?

Place a pushbutton telephone with large, easy-to-dial numbers near the bed (be careful with the telephone cords)

Q. At night, is there enough light to go from your bed to the bathroom?

Install a nightlight along the path to your bathroom

Q. Is your bed very high or very low?

Adjust the height of your bed so that when you are sitting on the edge with your feet on the floor your knees are at a 90 degree angle

Bathrooms

Q. Does the tub or shower floor have a non-slip surface?

Install a rubber mat or self-stick strips on the floor to prevent slips

Q. Do you have grab bars by the toilet, tub, and shower?

- Consider installing grab-bars in all bathrooms, by the toilet and in the bathtub or shower (It is a good idea to have two bars in the tub: one on the sidewall and one on the back wall)

Q. Do you have difficulty getting on or off the toilet?

- Consider installing an elevated toilet seat (in addition to grab bars)

Q. Do you have a fixed showerhead?

- Consider installing a hand held adjustable showerhead

Preventing Medication Mishaps & Poisonings

Q. Are your medications clearly labeled and safely stored?

- Store medicines in containers with their original labels
- Keep your medications stored separately from those of other family members
- Discard outdated medications
- Store medications away from direct sunlight in a place with minimal humidity

Q. Are cleaners, household chemicals, and other poisons clearly marked and stored away from food?

- Store cleaners, chemicals and poisons in their original clearly marked containers in a secure area away from edibles

Q. Do you routinely check if any food items are expired?

- Check the expiration date on all food items regularly and discard expired items
- Date leftovers so they can be used within a safe time period

Q. Do you have a first aid kit?

- Get a first aid kit approved by your doctor or the American Red Cross

Q. Do you have emergency numbers posted near the phone?

- Keep emergency numbers by the phone: poison control center, hospital emergency room, doctor, neighbors, relatives, and friends

Crime Prevention

Q. Do all windows and doors lock properly?

- Check all windows and doors regularly to make sure they lock properly

Q. Do you have a deadbolt on exterior doors and can you see who is at the door?

- Secure all exterior doors with a deadbolt

If you cannot see through a window, install a door viewer (peep hole) in all external doors

Q. Do you have a home security system?

Considering installing a home security system

Q. Is the property well lit?

Consider installing lighting to illuminate the edges of your property

Q. If you have a firearm in your home, is it stored safely?

Store the firearm unloaded in a locked box, out of reach of children; store it loaded only if you want ready-access for defensive use

Q. If you have a firearm in your home, do you know how to use it?

Obtain firearm training or consider turning it over to the local police department