



For the Lifespan: The Caregiver Guide

Module 9

Keeping Your Home and the Person You Care For Safe

Participant Guide

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PURPOSE



The purpose of Module 9 is to help you keep the person you care for and your home safer and more secure. This module will cover home assessments, avoiding falls, equipment safety, avoiding infections, medication use, avoiding fire, and preparing for emergencies.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN



After completing this module, you will be able to:

- Learn what to assess in your home.
- Understand how to avoid falls.
- Identify equipment safety guidelines.
- Learn procedures to avoid infections.
- Understand how to store and use medication.
- Identify ways to avoid fire.
- Learn how to prepare for emergencies.

ASSESSING DANGERS IN YOUR HOME



Assessing your home for safety hazards will help minimize or eliminate accidents and potential dangerous situations. This assessment should include the safety, functionality, and accessibility of entrances and rooms, structural integrity, plumbing, electrical system, animal care and control, pests, sanitation, and if there is excessive clutter or hoarding. You can conduct a general assessment of the entire home yourself or you can hire a home

inspector or good contractor that you trust. You can find inspection forms on the web, including:

<http://www.totalhomeinspection.com/TotalHomeInspectionChecklist.pdf>, <http://www.samplechecklist.com/homeinspection.html>, www.hud.gov/offices/adm/hudclips/letters/mortgagee/files/99-32att.pdf.



If you find problem areas, you will want to contact a local professional or specialist for repairs, but unfortunately there are some home repair scams, so get recommendations first from your home insurance or a home warranty company. They usually have good contractors for different systems that they can recommend. Also check with friends, neighbors, and family for their recommendations. Once you find someone, check their contractor's license and insurance. Get quotes in writing and don't pay for any labor upfront (paying reasonable costs for materials are okay, but not for the entire job before it's done). Ask for copies of receipts.

More information about assessing different areas is shown below.



Entry, Stairs, Hallways – The pathways should be clear and well-lit both day and night. There should be low or no thresholds. The floor should be in good condition. Doorways should accommodate a wheelchair or walker, if applicable. There should be space to maneuver while opening and closing doors. There should be a peephole or view panel in the front door. Remove, clear out, and keep out any obstacles from pathways that may cause tripping, including cords, boxes, newspapers, loose rugs, furniture, plants, books, or anything else.



The exterior door should have a deadbolt lock. Inside and outside door handles and locks should be easy to operate. If not, consider

using adaptive door handles. See UCare Module 11 on assistive technology or the website <http://www.abledata.com> that has almost 40,000 product listings for more information on adaptive products or assistive technology.

Windows should open and close easily from the inside, and have secure sturdy locks.



Kitchen – Appliances should all be clean and in good working condition. There should be adequate lighting. Oven controls should be marked and easily used. They should be located on the front or side, not in the back where the person has to reach over the burners. Curtains, hot pads, or towels should not be close to the burners where they might catch fire. Hot pads should be stored in a close drawer to the oven and range. There should not be piles of dirty dishes or spoiled food. There should be at least some food in the pantry and refrigerator at all times. A sturdy step stool should be used to reach high cupboards.



Bathroom – Make sure the water temperature is set below 120 degrees as older people may lose temperature sensitivity and scald themselves without knowing it. Install a shower rod that is bolted to the wall. Install a portable higher toilet seat or raised toilet base if balance or getting up and down are an issue. The flush handle can be adapted. If the person you care for has trouble using a tub or shower, buy a plastic shower bench or bath chair and install a hand-held shower head. There should be grab bars by the toilet, bath, and shower with secure wall reinforcement. The shower door should be safety glass or plastic. The towel bars and soap dish should be durable. Faucet handles should be easy to turn on and off. All small appliances should be unplugged and away from sources of water. Hot water pipes should be insulated.



Bedrooms – Install a lamp, flashlight, and phone near the bed with emergency numbers. The lamp switch can be enlarged or use a touch-control lamp. The height of the bed should not be too high or difficult to get into and out of. A bed rail can be installed to prevent falling out of bed. There should not be clutter, books, or clothing on the floor. Nightlights should be used to light the way to the bathroom.



Flooring/Rugs – Remove loose rugs to eliminate tripping hazards. Bath mats should be secured with non-slip, double-sided rug tape. Floors should not be waxed or slippery. Use non-skid floor wax. Consider placing carpeting over concrete, ceramic, or marble floors to lessen the severity of injury if your care recipient falls.



Garage/Driveway – Walkway surfaces should be smooth, without holes or uneven joints. Cracks should be repaired. Snow, leaves, and ice should be removed from walkways and stairs. The garage should be adequately ventilated. The garage door should open automatically and be easy to operate.



Electrical – The electrical system should be up to code and have enough capacity to serve the house. Overload protection should be provided by circuit breakers, fuses, or ground fault circuit interrupters. Outlets should be properly grounded. Appliances should have automatic shutoff features if mistakenly left on. Extension cords should not carry more than indicated and should be out of the flow of traffic. There should be no exposed bulbs in lamps or fixtures. Small portable air heaters should be at least three feet from beds, curtains, or anything flammable. No flammable materials should be stored inside the house or garage. Fire extinguishers should be stored on every floor, in the kitchen,

bedroom, and basement. Check the expiration dates regularly and know how to use them. Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors should also be on every level with batteries changed annually and checked monthly, covering all sleeping areas.



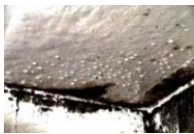
Heating/Cooling systems should be in good working order, inspected, and serviced annually. Outside vents should be properly sealed and free of obstruction to prevent carbon monoxide buildup.



Plumbing – There should be no leaks with everything functioning correctly. The main shut-off valve must be easy to reach, in working order, and not leaking. Label all shut-off valves. All hot water systems should have an emergency shut-off valve.



Structural Integrity - There should be no damage to the structure. The foundation should be strong and free from flaws and defects. The roof should not leak. Walls should be inspected for cracks, holes, stains, or the presence of mold or mildew. Floors and ceilings should be inspected for water intrusion, stains, and damaged areas. There should not be cracks or leaks in windows. Water should run away from the home, not towards the home.



Animal Care and Control – Animals should be under control and their hair and waste cleaned up. There should not be the odor of urine or excrement.



Pests - Check for infestations of ants, termites, roaches, rodents, or other pests.

Sanitation – There should be no odors from animals, food, or natural gas. There should not be piles of dirty dishes, clothes, or towels; spoiled food; or broken fixtures. If the person you care for is



unable to clean or pick up, consider asking for volunteer help or hiring someone to clean and do laundry on a weekly basis.



Clutter/Hoarding – Excessive clutter should be removed from all rooms, especially if it is stacked on the floor, counters, and other places. Talk to the person you care for about the increased risks of injury, fire danger, allergies, and health problems. Make constructive suggestions to change things, such as using storage bins, donating unused items, digitizing photos and paper piles, borrowing instead of purchasing, etc. Counseling is a good idea if the person you care for is willing; you can offer to go with them. Freecycle.org is a non-profit that is about reuse and keeping things out of landfills, free items can be listed and people that want them will come pick them up. You can also request free items you need.

AVOIDING FALLS



Falls are a major cause of injury, disability, and loss of independence for people who are 65 or older. One in three adults falls every year. Many falls result in a broken hip and can unfortunately result in early death. The following simple precautions can help prevent falls.



- The person you care for should get a general annual checkup, including eyes and ears.
- Encourage your care recipient to move frequently and take up exercise to improve strength, coordination, endurance, flexibility, and balance. Exercise can occur through outdoor activities, classes, or at home. Continuing to exercise is more likely to happen if it is done through enjoyable activities. More on exercise can be found in UCare Modules 1 and 10.
- Encourage the person you care for to get up slowly after sitting or lying down.

- Shoes should not have heels. They should be flat, fit well, be non-slip, sturdy, and comfortable. Thin soles are generally better as thick soles can cause tripping. Try to avoid having the person you care for walk around in slippers or barefoot.
- Install secure railing along both sides of the stairs and grab bars in bathrooms by the toilet and tub.
- Place non-slip strips in the bath and shower.
- Remove loose rugs, install non-slip pads on slick floors, and change flooring if it is old, frayed, bumpy, or slippery. Clean with non-skid wax.
- Put reflective tape at the bottom, top, and edge of all stairs.
- Install nightlights in the bedrooms, bathrooms, hallways, and stairways.
- Make sure your home is well-lit and free of cords and other tripping hazards.
- Move commonly used items to the lower shelves in kitchen and other cupboards.
- Make sure your care recipient uses a step stool with a bar and never a chair to reach items on high shelves. Try to avoid ever using a step stool by keeping items on lower shelves.
- Consider buying an alert or alarm device in case the person you care for falls and can't get up.

SAFE EQUIPMENT USE



Make sure you understand how all new equipment works before you take it home. Ask for a manual if it isn't provided and read it carefully. A nurse or therapist may also teach you how to properly use equipment. The following are general guidelines.

Wheelchairs - Wheelchairs should be in good repair. Surfaces can be wiped down with a damp cloth and a mild detergent or cleaner



when needed. Always lock the brakes before your care recipient transfers in or out of the chair. If it is a power chair, turn the power off before transferring. Lift the footplates up before getting in or out. Do not place heavy items on the back of the wheelchair. Use the seatbelt at all times to avoid falls. Cushions ought to be comfortable and fit well. The person you care for should be evaluated by a therapist for proper seating and positioning.



Oxygen – Keep oxygen away from flame or high heat and flammable items. Tanks should be kept in an upright stable position so they don't tip over. Read the supplier's instructions on safe use and storage. Have an emergency back-up supply plan.

AVOIDING INFECTION FOR YOU AND THE PERSON YOU CARE FOR



It is important to assess the sanitation conditions or level in the bathroom, kitchen, and the general household. All surfaces should be clean and picked up. There should be no odors from animals, food, or natural gas.

Make it a habit to wear disposable gloves, especially when cleaning up blood and bodily fluids, or when changing pads or diapers. Face masks and eye shields may also be used if cleaning up or working in hazardous or infectious conditions. Clean urinals and bedpans with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup bleach mixed with a gallon of water. Replace them every month. If you get blood or any body fluid in your eyes, nose, mouth, or open wound, wash immediately with water and call your healthcare provider or hospital for advice.



Use needles or syringes only once. Don't put caps back on needles. Do not take needles off syringes. Touch only the barrel. Put the used needle and syringe in a glass bottle, coffee can, or other container that can't be punctured.

Use hand sanitizing gels. Make sure that you and all in-home workers wash for 20 seconds with soap and running water (go through the happy birthday song twice).

MEDICATION



The Home Alone AARP Public Policy Institute/United Hospital Fund report found that 75% of surveyed caregivers manage many kinds of medications, including injections. There are an estimated 700,000 emergency room visits and 120,000 hospitalizations for medication-related adverse events every year (JAMA, 2006). Many patients use many prescriptions which may either have counteract effects or cause more severe reactions.



Tell your physician or pharmacist about all medications and supplements to avoid harmful drug interactions and to make sure the quantities are within normal limits. Ask for a “brown bag” checkup by putting all of the medications and herbal supplements in a bag and asking the doctor or pharmacist to check for any potential problems. Talk to the pharmacist when a new prescription is given and check the name, condition, purpose, and dosage to ensure it is the same as what the doctor said. If there is a difference, ask the pharmacist to call the doctor. Ask about side effects. Try to use one pharmacy or a primary pharmacy.

Use a medication organizer. There are some available with large print labels or large print bill boxes. Colored rubber bands can be used to identify medications. Label each medication with name, dosage, time to administer, and purpose.

Keep a notebook that lists all medications and supplements. Write down each time a medication is given. Note any side effects to

discuss with the doctor. Consider buying an electronic dispenser that beeps when it's time to take medication. If the pill is not taken, a phone or text message is sent.

All medications should be properly stored with child-proof lids if needed. Store all medications at room temperature, preferably in a closet, drawer, or somewhere else without moisture, not in the bathroom cabinet.

Wash your hands before and after giving the medication.



Do not flush prescription drugs down the toilet as it may contaminate ground water. Use a community drug take-back program, if available. If not, mix with coffee grounds or cat litter and place in a different sealed container before putting in the trash. Black out information on the empty bottle and throw away.

TIPS TO AVOID FIRE



Inspect your home, including the condition of your fireplace, appliances, heating and air conditioning, as well as natural gas and electrical systems. All systems and appliances should be fully functional and in good working condition.



Install and update smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors. There should be alarms and detectors on every level. Buy at least one fire extinguisher and keep it in the kitchen, but storing one on every floor is safer. Check the expiration date and replace when recommended.

Don't leave the kitchen when cooking or turn off the stove if you do. Don't cook when you are very tired or using drugs or alcohol. Turn handles in and don't leave things on the stove.

Make sure that the person you care for doesn't smoke in bed or when lying down to prevent falling asleep.

Don't overload electrical outlets and be careful with extension cords. Discard any cords with frayed or cracked wires.

Get rid of excessive clutter. As mentioned previously, if your care recipient has problems with hoarding, encourage counseling.

Have an emergency escape plan in case of fire. Identify two ways to escape from every room. If there is a fire, don't try to save anything, get out as fast as possible!

PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES

Preparing



- Make a list of emergency (medical, fire, police, 911, etc.) and family contacts and keep in a handy place.
- Jointly determine and discuss having two potential meeting places if something happens.
- Find out where potential community shelters are.
- Label the shut-off valves for utilities.
- Purchase a preassembled First Aid kit or put one together and keep it in a handy place.
- Put together disaster supplies listed below in a backpack or suitcase that can quickly be utilized in case of disaster.



Disaster Supplies

- Food (at least a three day supply of non-perishable food).
- Water (one gallon per day per person for at least three days).
- Medications (at least a three day supply).
- Flashlight and extra batteries.

- Crank or battery powered radio.
- Other supplies: manual can opener, moist towelettes, garbage bags, tape, plastic sheeting, matches.
- Personal items and sanitary supplies.
- First aid kit.
- Cell phone with charger, inverter, hand crank, or solar charger.
- Cash or checks.
- Sleeping bags and blankets for each person.
- Complete change of clothing for each person.
- Paper cups, plates, plastic utensils, paper towels.

REVIEW

Assess your care recipient's home for the safety, functionality, and accessibility of entrances and rooms, structural integrity, plumbing, electrical system, animal care and control, pests, sanitation, medications, and if there is excessive clutter/hoarding.



Encourage the person you care for to get an annual check-up, exercise, wear flat sturdy shoes, get up slowly, and use lower shelves. Remove throw rugs and change slippery floors.

Make sure you completely understand how all new equipment works before taking it home. Engage the wheelchair brake before attempting any transfers.

Tell your physician or pharmacist about all medications and supplements. Use a medication organizer and label each medication with name, dosage, time to administer, and purpose. All medications should be properly stored with child-proof lids if needed. Note any side effects.

Install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors on every level. Buy at least one fire extinguisher and keep in the kitchen, but preferably one on each level of your home. Don't leave the kitchen when cooking or turn off the stove if you do. Don't overload electrical outlets and be careful with extension cords. Discard any cords with frayed or cracked wires.

Make a list of emergency (medical, fire, police, 911, etc.) and family contacts and keep in a handy place. Have two potential meeting places if something happens. Label the shut-off valves for utilities. Purchase or put together a First Aid kit and keep it in a handy place. Put disaster supplies in a backpack or suitcase.

We hope that this information has been helpful to you and will keep you and the person you care for safer and more secure.

TAKE A BREAK

- When I am feeling stressed, I can:
 - Meditate
 - Use positive self-talk
 - Take a walk
 - Exercise
 - Surf the internet
 - Read something interesting
 - Eat tasty nutritious meals
 - Strive for balance

THINGS TO REMEMBER



- Remember to take good care of yourself by staying positive, exercising regularly, getting enough rest, eating nutritiously, using good body mechanics, keeping a sense of humor, relaxing, and doing things you enjoy when you can.

- Always believe in yourself and your abilities.
- Remember that you have the strength, courage, compassion, and wisdom to succeed.

UCARE MODULE TOPICS

1. Providing Personal Care
2. Dementia and Memory Loss
3. A) Caring for Older Adults with Chronic Health Issues
3. B) Caring for Children with Special Health Care Needs
4. The Accessible Home
5. Taking Care of the Caregiver
6. Caring for those with Depression, Anxiety, Stress, or Mental Health Issues
7. Community Supports for Remaining at Home
8. Working Effectively with In-Home Service Providers
9. Keeping Your Home and the Person You Care For Safe
10. Eating Healthy for Life
11. Assistive Devices: Tools to Help You
12. Legal and Financial Matters: What You Need to Know

For more information, please visit: <http://www.ucare.utah.gov>

Acknowledgements

The UCare training materials were developed at the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University by:

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Judith M. Holt, Ph.D., Utah State University

Jeanie Peck, LCSW, Utah State University

Alma Burgess, M.S., Utah State University

Tracy Golden, Ph.D., Utah Valley University

Sherry Castro, Utah State University

The following individuals played a significant role in reviewing and refining the UCare training materials:

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Megan Forbush

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Carrie Schonlaw

Paula Ledford

Geri Lehnardt

Stacy Wardwell

Diane Allen

And ongoing support from the members of the Utah Coalition for Caregiver Support

Additional agencies and individuals involved in the review
and editing of the ACTC materials include:

Connie B. Panter, Utah State University

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For more information, please visit: <http://www.ucare.utah.gov>,
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This project was supported in part by grant number 90LR0021/01 from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201. Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Administration for Community Living policy.

The Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University
provided additional funding.

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