



# **For the Lifespan: The Caregiver Guide**

## **Module 9**

### **Keeping Your Home and the Person You Care For Safe**

#### **Leader Guide**

# Module 9

## Keeping Your Home and the Person You Care For Safe

### PURPOSE

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The purpose of Module 9 is to help caregivers keep the person they care for and their 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.

### OBJECTIVES

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**After completing this module, participants 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.

### SLIDE 1

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**UCare**  
**For the Lifespan: The Caregiver Guide**  
**Module 9**  
**Keeping Your Home and the Person You Care For Safe**

## INTRODUCE

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Introduce yourself and allow everyone present to introduce themselves and explain their caregiving role.

## NOTE

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This is an excellent time to set the tone of the training. Be friendly, relaxed, and focused. Remember names or use name tags.

## ASK

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What would you like to get out of the training today?

## NOTE

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Put responses on a white board and during the training refer back to them. Put a check by specific topics discussed.

## TELL

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The handouts are yours to take home. There is room to write on the handouts during the training session.

## SLIDE 2

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### **Objectives**

After completing this module, participants 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.

## TELL

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In this workshop we will be giving examples of our experiences that may be difficult for some. Remember to respect the confidentiality of the group members. Personal experiences that are shared among the group should not leave the room.

These are our objectives today. We are going to discuss areas to assess in your home, equipment guidelines, medication, avoiding fire, and preparing for emergencies.

## ASK

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Is there anything else that you would like to discuss pertaining to safety today?

The first topic we will discuss is home assessment. Has anyone assessed their home for dangers? If so, what did you find?

## SLIDE 3

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### **Assessing Dangers in Your Home**

- Assessing your home for safety hazards will help minimize or eliminate accidents and danger.
- 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/hoarding.
- You can conduct an assessment of the entire home yourself, or you can hire a home inspector.

## TELL

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It is important to assess every area and system of your home. You can do this yourself or hire a home inspector or good contractor that you trust. Look for any potential dangers, if the area is functional and being used as intended, and how accessible it is for you and the person you care for. We will go through these different areas in more detail.

## ASK

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What should you do if you find problems?

## SLIDE 4

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### **Repairs**

- If you find problems, contact a professional.
- To avoid scams, get recommendations from your home insurance or a home warranty company.
- Also check with friends, neighbors, and family for their recommendations.
- Check for contractor's license and insurance.
- Get three 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.

## TELL/ASK

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Contact a contractor, electrician, or other professional. What is the best way to find someone to work on your house? Ask a home warranty or insurance company and real estate offices for recommendations. Check with your friends and family. Read reviews online if there are any available. Ask for bids in writing

from at least three contractors. Don't pay upfront unless it is for materials. Ask for copies of receipts.

## SLIDE 5

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### **Entry, Stairs, Hallways**

- Pathways should be clear and well-lit day and night.
- There should be low or no thresholds.
- The floor should be in good condition.
- Doorways should accommodate a wheelchair or walker with space to maneuver when opening/closing.
- There should be a peephole or view panel.
- The exterior door should have a deadbolt lock.
- Door handles and locks should be easy to operate.
- Windows should be secure and easy to open/close.

## TELL

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All paths should be clear and well-lit. There should be either low or no thresholds. The floors should be in good condition. Doorways should be able to accommodate a wheelchair, if needed. A peephole or view panel can quite easily be installed. Doors leading outside should have a deadbolt. Door locks and windows should be secure and easy to operate.

## ASK

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What are the things to look for in a kitchen as far as safety goes?

## SLIDE 6

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### **Kitchen**

- Appliances should be clean and in good condition.
- There should be adequate lighting.

- Oven controls easily used, marked, and in the front.
- Curtains and towels shouldn't be next to burners.
- Hot pads should be easy to reach.
- No piles of dirty dishes or spoiled food.
- Food in the pantry and refrigerator.
- Put common items on lower shelves.
- Sturdy step stool and a reacher/grabber for high cupboards.

## DISCUSS/ASK

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Of course all appliances should work. There should be adequate lighting. Oven controls should be in front, not in the back over the burners. Hot pads should be easy to reach. Curtains, hot pads, and towels should not be close to the burners where they could catch fire. There should not be spoiled food or piles of dirty dishes. There should be food in the pantry and refrigerator. Frequently used food should be stored on lower shelves. There should be a sturdy step stool and a reacher/grabber for high cupboards.

Next we will talk about the bathroom. What is the preferred water temperature? What are some other ways to make the bathroom safer?

## SLIDE 7

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### **Bathroom**

- Water temperature set below 120 degrees.
- Install a shower rod that is bolted to the wall.
- Install a portable higher toilet seat.
- Buy a shower chair and hand-held shower head.
- Grab bars by the toilet, bath, and shower.

- The shower door should be safety glass or plastic.
- Faucet handles should be easy to use.
- All appliances unplugged and away from water.
- Hot water pipes should be insulated.

## DISCUSS/ASK

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The temperature should be below 120 degrees. The shower rod should be bolted to the wall. A higher seat is usually safer and easier to use if the person has trouble getting up or down or with balance. A shower bench or chair is easier if the person has trouble standing or getting in and out of the tub. Of course all small appliances should be unplugged and away from the water.

What are some ways to make the bedroom safer?

## SLIDE 8

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### **Bedrooms**

- Lamp, flashlight, and phone near bed.
- List of emergency numbers.
- Enlarged lamp switch or touch-control lamp.
- Height of the bed should not be too high.
- A bed rail can 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.

## DISCUSS/ASK

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Make sure the room has good lighting with a nightstand that has a lamp, flashlight, and phone. The lamp switch can be enlarged if needed or use one with touch-control. The bed should not be



hard to get in or out. A bed rail can easily be installed. Clutter should be eliminated. Nightlights should be used.

How safe are throw rugs? What is the problem with them?

## SLIDE 9

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### **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.

## DISCUSS/ASK

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Of course, loose rugs can slip and cause tripping. Mats in the bathroom can be secured with non-slip rug tape. Floors should never be slippery. Use non-skid wax. Consider carpeting concrete, ceramic, or marble floors in case the person you care for falls.

What hazards are present in the garage and driveway?

## SLIDE 10

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### **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.

## DISCUSS/ASK

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There should be smooth even surfaces. Repair cracks. Remove leaves, snow, and ice. The door should open automatically and be easy to operate. The garage should be ventilated.

What safety precautions can you take as far as electrical systems?

## SLIDE 11

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### **Electrical**

- Electrical system up to code with enough capacity.
- Overload protection by circuit breakers, fuses, or ground fault circuit interrupters.
- Outlets should be properly grounded.
- Appliances should have automatic shutoff features.
- Cords should not carry more than indicated.
- Small portable air heaters at least three feet away.
- No flammable materials inside house or garage.
- Fire extinguishers, smoke alarms, and carbon monoxide detectors on every floor.

## DISCUSS/ASK

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The system should be up to code with enough capacity. Make sure there is overload protection. Don't overload cords. Make sure there are no flammable materials in the house or garage.

Small portable heaters should be at least three feet away from beds, curtains, or anything flammable. Have smoke/carbon monoxide detectors and fire extinguishers on every floor.

Does everyone know where their water shut-off valve is?

## SLIDE 12

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### **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.

## TELL

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There should not be any leaks. The main shut-off valve should be easy to reach and labeled. All hot water systems should have a shut-off valve.

The next area we will discuss is structural integrity.

## SLIDE 13

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### **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.

## TELL/ASK

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The structure should obviously be sound. The foundation should not have defects or flaws. The roof should not leak. Walls should be inspected for cracks, holes, stains, and mold or mildew. Floors and ceilings should be inspected for water, stains, and damaged areas. Windows should not be broken or cracked. Water should run away not towards the home.

Has anyone had a problem with a squirrel or other rodent getting in their house or walls? Next we are going to discuss animals.

## SLIDE 14

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### **Animals/Pests**

- 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.

## TELL

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Animals can be wonderful companions, but they are also a lot of work, which may be difficult for the person you care for. Make sure that their hair and waste are cleaned

up frequently. There should also not be odors from urine or excrement. Check for any infestations of insects, rodents, or other pests.

This leads us to the next subject on general sanitation.

## SLIDE 15

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### **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.

## TELL

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Again, there should not be odors in the house. If there are piles of dirty dishes, clothes, food, or other objects, consider asking for volunteer help or hiring someone to clean on a weekly basis. Sometimes large piles of clutter, dishes, or clothing can be an indicator of hoarding.

## SLIDE 16

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### **Clutter/Hoarding**

- Excessive clutter should be removed from all rooms.
- Talk about the increased risks of injury, fire danger, allergies, and health problems.
- Make constructive suggestions to change things. Counseling is a good idea; you can offer to go with them.

- Freecycle.org is a non-profit that is about reuse and keeping things out of landfills, items can be listed and people that want them will come pick them up.

## TELL/ASK

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Of course excessive clutter should be removed from all rooms, but often this is easier said than done. Talk to the person you care for about the increased health risks, as well as fire and injuries. Make constructive suggestions if you can. You will probably need to get a counselor involved, if the person is willing. There is a non-profit across the state and country called freecycle.org that lists items to give away and people will come pick them up if they are interested. Has anyone here used them? Reducing clutter can also reduce the possibility of falls.

What are some other ways to reduce the chance of falls?

## SLIDE 17

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### **Avoiding Falls**

- General annual checkup, including eyes and ears.
- Move frequently and exercise. Get up slowly.
- Shoes should be flat, fit well, non-slip, sturdy, and comfortable. Avoid walking in slippers or barefoot.
- Install railing along stairs and grab bars in bathrooms.
- Place non-slip strips in the bath and shower.
- Remove rugs, install non-slip pads on slick floors.
- Change flooring if it is old, frayed, bumpy, or slippery.
- Clean with non-skid wax.

- Put reflective tape at bottom, top, and edge of all stairs.

## TELL/ASK

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Falls are a major cause of injury, disability, and loss of independence. There are many ways to avoid falls, which are one of the most common injuries for older people. Encourage the person you care for to get annual checkups, exercise, and move frequently. Getting up slowly is a good idea. Shoes should not have heels, and be sturdy and comfortable. Install railing along stairs and grab bars in the bathroom. Remove throw rugs and change frayed, bumpy, or slippery flooring. Reflective tape helps to illuminate stairs. What are some other ideas?

## SLIDE 18

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### **Avoiding Falls (cont.)**

- Install nightlights in the bedrooms, bathrooms, hallways, and stairways. Areas well-lit.
- Walkways free of cords and tripping hazards.
- Move used items to the lower shelves.
- Use a step stool with a bar and never a chair. Try to avoid using a step stool at all by keeping items on low shelves.
- Consider buying an alarm device to use in case the person you care for falls and can't get up.

## ASK

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Nightlights are another way to provide illumination. Areas should have good lighting. Get rid of tripping hazards. Try to eliminate the need to reach objects on higher shelves, but if

you do, use a step stool, not a chair. An alarm device is something to consider.

If you do buy one, make sure you learn how it works before you leave the store, which is a good practice for all types of equipment.

## SLIDE 19

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### **Safe Equipment Use**

- Learn how equipment works before you take it home. Ask for a manual and read it carefully.
- Wheelchairs should be in good repair. Wipe surfaces with a damp cloth and a mild cleaner. Lock the brakes and turn power off before transfers. Do not place heavy items on the back. Use the seatbelt. Cushions ought to be comfortable and fit well. A therapist should evaluate for seating/positioning.
- Keep oxygen upright and away from flame or heat. Read instructions. Have a back-up supply plan.

## ASK/DISCUSS

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How many of you use medical equipment? Do you have the manual? Read it carefully. Learn how equipment works before you take it home.

Make sure that oxygen is kept away from flame or heat and that you have a back-up supply plan.

How many use wheelchairs? A therapist should evaluate the person you care for so the cushion and chair fit properly. Do you know how to clean it?



What are some ways you can avoid infection?

## SLIDE 20

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### **Avoiding Infection**

- Assess sanitation in bathroom, kitchen, and house.
- Wear disposable gloves, especially with fluids or changing pads/diapers. Clean with  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup bleach in gallon of water. Replace urinals, bed pans monthly. If you get body fluid in eyes, nose, mouth, or open wound, wash immediately and call a doctor.
- Use needles or syringes one time only. Don't put caps back on needles. Touch only the barrel. Put used ones in a can or bottle that can't be punctured.
- Use hand sanitizing gels. Make sure you and any workers wash for 20 seconds with soap and water.

## TELL/ASK

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Make sure that all rooms in the house, especially the bathrooms and kitchen, are sanitary. When you work with body fluids, wear disposable gloves. Clean with  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup bleach to 1 gallon of water. Replace pans monthly. Use needles one time only. Don't put caps back on. Place used ones in a can. Use hand sanitizing gels, and wash for 20 seconds with soap.

How many hospital visits do you think are a result of adverse drug events for older adults? What are some things you do to minimize errors and/or adverse reactions?

**Medication**

- 700,000 ER visits and 120,000 hospitalizations for medication problems annually.
- Tell doctor or pharmacist about all meds and supplements to avoid drug interactions and ensure quantities are within limits.
- Use medication organizer. Label each with name, dosage, time, and purpose.
- Note any side effects, time given, and dosage.
- Store properly. Wash hands before/after.

**TELL/ASK**

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There are 700,000 ER visits and 120,000 hospitalizations for medication problems annually. Some things that you can do to avoid errors or adverse reactions are to make sure your doctor or pharmacist knows about all of the medications your care recipient is taking. 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 just one pharmacy or at least have a primary pharmacy. Label each medication with the name, dosage, time, and purpose. Write down any side effects along with the time given and dosage so you can discuss with the doctor in a notebook. Store all medications at room

temperature, preferably in a closet, drawer, or somewhere else without moisture, not in the bathroom cabinet.

What are some things you can do to prevent fire?

## SLIDE 22

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### **Preventing Fire**

- Inspect fireplace, appliances, heating/air conditioning, gas and electrical systems.
- Install and/or update smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors on every level.
- Store a current fire extinguisher on every floor.
- Don't leave the kitchen when cooking or turn off the stove. Don't cook when tired or using drugs or alcohol. Turn handles in. Keep stove clear.
- Make sure the person doesn't smoke in bed.
- Don't overload outlets or extension cords.
- Discard excessive clutter.
- Have an emergency escape plan in case of fire.

## TELL/ASK

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Inspect any fireplaces, electrical appliances, heating/air conditioning, as well as gas and electrical systems on an annual basis. Make sure that there are smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors, and fire extinguishers on every level of your home. When you are using the stove, don't leave the room. Turn all handles in. No one should smoke in bed or when lying down to prevent falling asleep. Outlets or cords should not be overloaded. Get rid of excessive clutter that could be a hazard. Plan an emergency escape in case of fire. Identify two ways to escape each room, if possible.

What are other things you can do to prepare for emergencies?

## SLIDE 23

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### **Preparing for Emergencies**

- Make a list of emergency and family contacts.
- Determine two meeting places.
- Find out where community shelters are.
- Label shut-off valves for utilities.
- Buy a First Aid kit and keep handy.
- Assemble disaster supplies and store in a backpack or suitcase.

## TELL/ASK

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Make a list of emergency and family contacts. Determine two possible meeting places if your home is damaged. Find out where the community shelters are. Locate and label the shut-off valves for water and gas. Locate your electrical circuit box and the main circuit that shuts off electricity.

What supplies should you have on hand in case of a disaster?

## SLIDE 24

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### **Disaster Supplies**

- Food, water, medications, flashlight/batteries, radio.
- Can opener, towelettes, bags, tape, plastic sheeting, matches.
- Clothes, personal items, 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.
- Paper cups, plates, plastic utensils, paper towels.

## DISCUSS

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This slide shows what should be assembled in case of emergency. Supplies include food, water, medications, flashlight, batteries, radio, clothes, first aid kit, cell phone with chargers, cash or checks, paper plates and utensils, sleeping bags, and blankets.

## ASK

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Let's review some of the main points today. What are some of the things you have learned from today's training?

## SLIDE 25

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### **Review**

- Assess home for safety, functionality, and accessibility.
- Encourage annual checkup, exercise, wear flat sturdy shoes, get up slowly, place items on low shelves.
- Remove all throw rugs and change slippery floors.
- Know how equipment works.
- Tell doctor about medications and supplements.
- Install or update smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors, and fire extinguishers on every level.
- Make a list of emergency contacts. Buy or assemble a disaster kit and supplies.

## DISCUSS

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Assess the home of the person you care for. Encourage annual checkups, regular exercise. Remove throw rugs and change slippery floors. Tell your doctor or pharmacist about all medications. Have smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors, and fire extinguishers on every level of your home. Buy or assemble an emergency or disaster kit and supplies.

## SLIDE 26

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### **Take a Break**

## SLIDE 27

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### **Take a Break (cont.)**

- 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

## DISCUSS

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What are some ways that you cope with stress? This slide lists some different ideas from meditating to walking, to reading, to eating. It's important to maintain a balance in your life. What are some other ideas on ways to relieve stress?

**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 some 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.
- Thanks for your participation.

**TELL**

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Again, one of the most important things you can do as a caregiver is to take good care of yourself. What are some ways to do this? Exercise, sleep well, use good body mechanics, relax and do something you enjoy every day, if possible. Remember that you have the strength, courage, compassion, and wisdom to succeed. I hope this class has been helpful for you. Thanks so much for your participation.

**UCARE MODULE TOPICS**

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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**



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