



For the Lifespan: The Caregiver Guide

Module 9

Keeping Your Home and the Person You Care for Safe



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.





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.





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.

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.





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 reacher/grabber for high cupboards.



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 handheld 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.

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.

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

- 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.



Plumbing

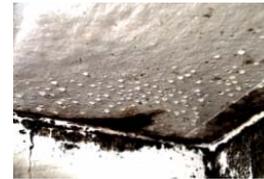


- There should be no leaks with everything functioning correctly.
- The main shut-off valve must be easy to reach, in working order, and not leaking.
- Label all shut-off valves.
- All hot water systems should have an emergency shut-off valve.

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.



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.



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.
- 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.

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.

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.

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.

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 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.



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.



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.

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 it handy.
- Assemble disaster supplies and store in a backpack or suitcase.

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.

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.

Take a Break



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



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.

