

Tips for home safety for older adults

Injuries sustained in the home, sometimes life threatening, are common among older adults. Simple everyday items and activities in the home can become safety hazards to a person whose health has declined. Assessing the hazards, either by yourself or with a professional, is very important. Many simple steps can prevent injury and create a safer living environment.

Fall prevention

According to the National Safety Council (www.nsc.org), thousands of Americans age 65 years and older die as a result of falls, and over a million have a fall injury that results in an emergency room visit. They are also one of the leading causes of admission to nursing homes.

- Do a quick sweep of the floors. If there are any throw rugs, either remove them or use non-slip backing or double-sided tape so the rugs won't slip or bunch up.

- Keep the floor free of clutter and objects like magazines, papers, shoes and extension cords.

- Keep the stairways well lit and free of objects. Install a handrail in all stairwells and be sure all carpeting is secure or that stairs have non-skid rubber treads. A strip of color contrast tape on the edge of the step can also enhance safety for persons with vision loss.

In the bathroom

- Install grab-bars near the toilet and in the bathtub and shower areas. Add a non-slip rubber mat on the tub/shower floor or use a tub/shower bench.

- To avoid scalds, turn water heater to 120 degrees Fahrenheit or below.

- Mark cold and hot faucets clearly.

- Use door locks that can be opened from both sides.

EPPIA Update

The Eden Prairie Professionals in Aging column focuses on the welfare of seniors in Eden Prairie. For more information about the group, visit www.edenprairieaging.org.

- If possible, bathe when help is available.

- Take a look at the medications that you are taking. Some of them can make you sleepy or dizzy which can lead to poor balance and falls.

- Discuss balance or dizziness with your physician or physical therapist and consider an appropriate exercise program.

- Install a night light in bedroom and bathroom

- Inspect and repair outdoor steps and sidewalks. Install handrails as needed.

Fire prevention

- Check that all electrical appliances, plugs and cords are in good working order.

- If a space heater is used, make sure it is away from flammable objects and not placed where it may be knocked over.

- Install fire extinguishers and smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on every floor, and regularly check their operation.

- Clearly mark exits and keep free of clutter

- Keep kitchen stove and burners clear of flammable objects. Assess the safety steps taken while the older adult is using the stove or microwave. Take constructive steps accordingly.

- Read and review the manufacturer's instructions on heating pads/electric blankets. Remove the blanket if there are any signs

of damage or if it is not operating properly.

- Use extreme caution when smoking. Never smoke when alone or in bed.

Poison prevention

- Clearly mark all medication and dosage.

- Remove outdated or spoiled food.

Emergency response

- Post emergency contact phone numbers near all phones.

- Fill out a File of Life which makes your medical history available to emergency personnel. The file is useful in situations if you become unconscious or unable to share information about your medications or allergies. File of Life packets are available at the Eden Prairie Senior Center and the Eden Prairie Police and Fire Departments. For more information about the File of Life, contact Officer Elizabeth Stroner at 952-949-6200.

Many members of the Eden Prairie Professionals in Aging group are available to help you assess your home safety and recommend constructive safety tips specific to your situation. What will take you only a few minutes today, can save you a lot of time, money and headache tomorrow. For more information, visit www.edenprairieaging.org.

Contributed by Heather Reynolds, At Home Solutions, www.athomesolutionsllc.com; Joanne Bartel, Prairie Adult Care, www.prairieadultcare.com; Dominic Gambino, A Place for Mom, www.aplaceformom.com; Judy Heim, Heartland Home Care, www.heartlandhomecare.com; Lisa Schmidtke, Independent Home Living @ <http://www.IHLCaregiver.com>.