

Protecting Yourself From Fire

Senior citizens are twice as likely to die in home fires as the rest of the population. With the United States having one of the highest overall fire death rates among industrialized nations, the danger posed to mature adults by fire is especially serious.



Preventing Fire

Death and injury from fire are largely preventable. For maximum safety:

Install smoke alarms on each level of your home, in every bedroom, hallway, and living room or den. *(For the hearing impaired, special smoke alarms that alert occupants with both sound and light are available.)* Test alarms once a month, and replace the batteries every six months. Do not remove the batteries for any reason other than to replace them. Periodically replace old alarms with new ones, according to the manufacturer recommendations.

Make sure space heaters are placed on solid, level flooring. Use extreme caution when operating space heaters. Do not brush against a heater. Clothes may catch fire.

Do not smoke in bed. Smoking accounts for nearly a quarter of smoking deaths. Do not smoke in bed under any circumstances. Don't empty ashtrays until all the matches and cigarettes are extinguished. *(And it's never too late to quit!)*

Make sure electrical cords are plugged into properly working wall outlets or surge protectors. Check your electrical cords once a month. If you notice any damaged or frayed cords, repair or replace them immediately.

Use candles with caution. If you must use candles, place them high on tables or mantels, away from curtains and other fabrics. Also, do not burn candles where cats and other pets may knock them over, possibly causing a fire. Never leave candles burning unattended.

Be careful while cooking. Don't wear sleeves that hang down and can catch fire. Don't leave cooking unattended, and turn off the oven and burners when you are finished cooking. If a cooking fire does start, remain calm and extinguish the fire by moving the lid of the pan over the fire from the side, not from above.

Be a good housekeeper. Remove trash regularly. Discard old newspapers and bags. Clutter may block an exit in a fire. Clear clutter from passageways and exits. Neatly arrange clothes and shoes in closets.

The "What Ifs" of Fire Safety...

1. If trapped in a fire, get low immediately and crawl to the nearest exit, with your head 12 to 24 inches from the floor. Cover your mouth and nose with a wet cloth. In a fire, smoke inhalation accounts for most deaths.
2. If a fire starts when you are sleeping, carefully roll out of bed and crawl to a door. With the back of your hand, touch the door. If the door is cool, open it slowly and crawl to safety. If the door is warm or hot, or if there is smoke coming in under the door, use another exit in the room.
3. If no safe exit is available, call 9-1-1 from your room and wait for help to arrive. Stay by the window so rescue personnel can easily locate you. Shine a flashlight or wave a white cloth from a window to help firefighters find you.
4. If you are above ground level, use the stairs to escape. Never use elevators for escape from fire.
5. If smoke impairs your ability to see, feel the walls to locate an exit or a stairwell. Plan ahead by memorizing how many doors are between your door and the stairwell.
6. If you safely exit a building on fire, do not enter the building again for any reason.



Fire Safety Checklist

Keep these items by your bed in case of fire:

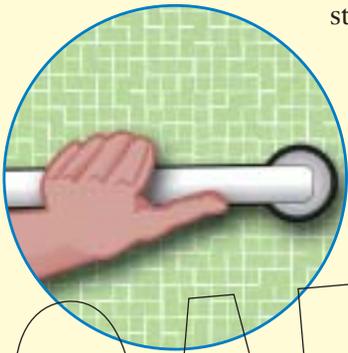
- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| ✓ Keys | ✓ Telephone |
| ✓ Eyeglasses | ✓ List of Emergency Numbers |
| ✓ Hearing aid | ✓ Whistle or bell |
| ✓ Walker or cane | ✓ Personal alarm "a device on |
| ✓ Flashlight | a necklace that can contact |
| | the proper authorities for you" |

Protecting Yourself From Falls

The risk of falling increases with age and is greater for women than for men. At least one-third of all falls involve hazards in the home — slippery floors, throw rugs, poor lighting, cluttered hallways, unsafe stairways and uneven door thresholds. To reduce your risk of falling, exercise often! Exercise increases muscle and bone strength and improves balance and flexibility. Other tips for reducing your risk of falling include the following:



- Eat nutritiously, consuming foods with calcium.
- Arrange furniture for maximum open space and clearest walkways.
- Keep floors free of clutter. Do not place electrical cords in walkways.
- Discard throw rugs or use non-slip tapes on the underside.
- Install handrails on both sides of a staircase. Use both rails when traveling up or down the stairs. Keep stairways clear of clutter. Use caution on all staircases: Short staircases can be just as hazardous as longer ones.
- Install grab bars by the toilet and in the bathtub. Water can create an extremely slippery surface. In the shower or tub, use non-skid mats.
- Wear low-heeled shoes with rubber soles that provide adequate arch support.
- Be sure not to stand up too quickly. If you become dizzy getting out of bed or a chair, take a moment to get your balance.
- Use canes and walkers if you need help keeping your balance. Whenever possible, have someone assist you when you walk outside your home.
- Have your eyes and ears checked by a doctor regularly, and follow your doctor's advice about the use of hearing aids and glasses.
- Talk to your doctor about the side effects of some medications, including drowsiness, disorientation or dizziness.
- Reduce or eliminate consuming alcohol.
- Install timers on lights. Use night lights, and consider purchasing clap-activated lights.



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Additional Resources and Information

A home health provider can inspect your home and provide recommendations for fire and fall safety. For additional information, contact your local senior citizen center or the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP).

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A Guide for Mature Adults

Protecting Yourself From Fire and Falls