

Home safety tips for seniors

It is said that with age comes wisdom. But no matter how old or wise a person you are, the smartest choice you can ever make is to always keep safety in mind when using products that can present safety hazards.

Last year, more than one million people over the age 65 were treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries associated with products they live with and use everyday. With the senior population in our country soaring and the "baby boomers" closing in on their sixties, this number of injuries could easily double over the next 20 years. That's why it's important for you to start spotting safety hazards and taking some simple steps to correct them--before you become a senior statistic!

Take a walk through your home, and use the following checklist to spot possible safety hazards. When/if you spot a potential problem, take the appropriate action to fix it IMMEDIATELY! Don't put it off 'til later... because you may forget about it until an accident or injury reminds you!

Family Room Safety Tips

- Make sure that all of your extension cords bear the UL Mark.
- Check all rugs and runners; electrical cords; lamps and other lighting; inspect the fireplace and chimney for fire hazards; and make sure all passageways are clear.
- Never keep an extension cord plugged in when not in use. The cord will still conduct electricity until it is unplugged from the outlet.
- Never use an extension cord that is cut, damaged or repaired. Touching even a single exposed strand of wire as fine as a thread can give you an electric shock or burn.
- Never run an electrical cord under a rug or carpet, or drape it over a hot surface such as a radiator or space heater. If a rug or other items cover the cord, heat can't escape and the cord can become too hot and possibly start a fire.
- When replacing a light bulb in a portable lamp or fixture, make sure that the replacement bulb is of equal or lesser wattage than that recommended by the lamp or fixture manufacturer. "Overlamping," the practice of using a light bulb that is of higher wattage than recommended by the manufacturer, can cause the lamp or fixture to overheat and start a fire.
- Only use portable electric air heaters as a supplementary source of heat; these devices are not intended to replace your home's heating system and should not be used without supervision. And always keep flammable materials -- including bedding, clothing, draperies, rugs and furniture -- at least three feet away from the heater.

Kitchen Safety Tips

- Buy electrical appliances that have been Listed by UL -- look for the UL Mark.
- Check all electrical cords for fraying/cracking; step stools for splitting/cracking materials; and throw rugs for tripping hazards like bumps and turned-up corners.
- Keep appliances and their cords away from water. If an appliance falls into the water, don't reach in to retrieve it until you've unplugged the appliance. Don't use the product again until you've had it inspected and repaired by a qualified technician.
- Never use or attempt to repair a damaged appliance; always consult a qualified technician.
- Unplug all countertop appliances when not in use. When plugged into an outlet, all appliances still have dangerous electrical voltages inside of them -- even when they're turned off.

- Every home should have working, UL Listed smoke detectors and fully charged UL Listed fire extinguishers strategically placed in the kitchen, garage and workshop.

Bedroom Safety Tips

- Install UL Listed smoke detectors and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms outside every sleeping area and near fuel-burning appliances.
- Install fresh batteries in your smoke detectors and CO alarms at least once a year.
- Develop and practice a fire escape plan for your household. Every family member should know at least two ways out of each room.
- Test your smoke detectors and CO alarms regularly and clean them as indicated in the use and care booklet. Hard-wired units, those permanently wired into your home's electrical system, should be tested monthly. Battery-operated units should be tested weekly.
- Check rugs and runners; electrical and telephone cords; and make sure the area around the bed is clear of items that could cause tripping.

Bathroom Safety Tips

- Make sure all small appliances bear the UL Mark.
- Never use appliances -- including lamps, radios, televisions and telephones -- near sinks, bathtubs, showers, pools or spas.
- Check bathtub/shower, rugs and mats for slipping hazards; the water for possible burn hazard; and cabinets for safe storage of medications.
- Never use an electric appliance or product for anything other than its intended use. Hair dryers aren't meant to thaw frozen pipes, dry clothing or warm bedding. Ovens aren't intended to heat your home. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for the proper use of a product.
- Have ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) outlets installed in the bathroom as well as in the kitchen, laundry room and workshop.
- Avoid falls by putting nonskid appliqués on the floor of your shower or tub and by installing heavy-duty grab bars around the tub, shower and toilet.

Basement/Garage/Workshop Safety Tips

- Make sure all power tools bear the UL Mark.
- Check fuse and breaker boxes for possible malfunction and shock/fire hazards; cords on tools and extension cords; and lawn/garden tools and supplies.
- Check for proper ventilation and make sure flammable liquids are stored properly.

Stair Safety Tips

- Check for proper lighting on/around stairways; handrails and steps for possible defects/weaknesses; and stair coverings for possible tripping hazards.

Once you've spotted existing problems, fix them immediately! Not even the safety professionals at UL can guarantee accidents will never happen. But this comprehensive household safety information can improve your odds and help you stay "on the safe side."

For more consumer safety information, visit <http://www.ul.com/regulators/pubedu.html>

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