Your Safety

Preventing accidents in your home

Advice for older people

In association with RoSPA

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

INFORMATION AND ADVICE
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Leaflets are free of charge and available from the Information Resources Team at the address on the back page, email adviceleaflets@helptheaged.org.uk or fax 0870 770 3282.

The advice in this leaflet was written in association with RoSPA, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents.

If you would like this leaflet in another format, such as large print or audio tape, please contact the Information Resources Team on 020 7278 1114.
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Most of us feel pretty safe in our homes. Yet more accidents happen at home than anywhere else. This leaflet is about the simple things you can do to make your home and garden safer.

If you would like advice on making your home secure, or on personal safety when you are out, see our free advice leaflet Your Security.

Moving about at home

Many accidents in the home are caused by slipping, tripping and bumping into things. In this section we look at ways to improve your balance and make moving around your home safer. A lot of this advice is common sense – but even small adjustments can make life easier.

- Keep as active as possible. Regular physical activity helps to improve your balance and keep your muscles strong.

- Eating a diet rich in calcium and vitamin D, and taking regular, weight-bearing exercise will help keep your bones healthy and reduce the risk of breaks or fractures. See our free advice leaflet Healthy Bones for more information.

- Keeping an eye out for things that could cause you to slip or trip can make your home safer to live in. For example, remember to keep the floor clear of trailing flexes and rucked-up or fraying carpets that you might trip over or slip on. If you have a pet, take care not to let it get under your feet.

- Good lighting is very important, particularly on the stairs.

- Fitting handrails to your stairs can make them easier and safer to climb. Make sure your stairs and floors are free of clutter. Don’t leave items on the stairs to be taken up later.
• Does the layout of your home help or hinder you? You could think about rearranging your furniture so that you can move around your home more easily.

• Have your eyes checked regularly. Eye tests are free if you are aged 60 or over. For more information, see our free advice leaflet Better Sight. Remember that reading glasses or bifocal or varifocal lenses can make objects and surfaces appear closer than they really are. This could cause you to trip or lose your balance. If you think this could be a problem for you, ask your optician for advice.

• Raising your arms and tipping your head back: for example, to clean windows or change a light bulb, can make some people light-headed and dizzy. If this happens to you, avoid this sort of task and ask for help from a friend, neighbour or relative.

For more information on improving strength and balance, and reducing the risk of falling, see our free advice leaflet Staying Steady.
Safety around the home

Just a few small changes can make each room in your home a safer place.

**In the bedroom**

- Check that your bed is the right height. When you are sitting on the edge, the soles of your feet should touch the floor and you should be able to stand up easily.
- It is easy to trip up when you first get out of bed. Watch out for sheets and bed covers trailing on the floor.
- Keep a bedside lamp or torch within easy reach in case you need to get up in the night. This could also be useful if there is a power failure.

**In the kitchen**

- Make sure that there is a clear space near the sink and cooker so that you can put hot pans down safely.
- Place things that you use every day within easy reach. You can avoid stretching up to reach high shelves or bending down into low cupboards by using long-handled ‘grabbers’ to extend your reach.
- Always remember to turn pan handles away from the front of the cooker so they don’t get knocked over.
- Use a timer to remind you that you’ve left something cooking.
- If you spill something on the floor, try to clean it up straight away.
In the bathroom

- To avoid scalding, either run the cold water before the hot, or run the taps together.

- A well-placed hand rail, bath seat and non-slip bath mat can help you keep your balance when you are getting in and out of the bath. The *Disabled Living Foundation* can advise on equipment that might best help you.

- **Never** use mains-powered electrical appliances in the bathroom.

- Keep all medicines in the bottles they came in, out of reach of children and pets and, ideally, locked away. For more information on taking medicines safely, see our free advice leaflet *Managing Your Medicines.*
Safety in the garden

Safety is just as important outside the house as it is inside. Keeping your garden tidy and free of obstacles goes a long way to making it safer.

- Watch out for uneven paths and slippery surfaces. Keep paths clear of leaves and overgrowing plants.

- Be careful of your eyes where there are overhanging trees and shrubs and unprotected canes or stakes.

- If you have to use a ladder in the garden, make sure it is standing at a safe angle, anchored at its base. You should always try to have someone with you who can hold the ladder steady; this will make it safer.

- Always use tools carefully and place them in a safe position when you put them to one side. If you have a shed, make sure you put tools away once you have finished using them and lock the door.

- When using power tools and electric mowers, use a power point fitted with a residual current device (RCD). This will shut off the power if an electrical fault develops or if you accidentally cut through the flex. You should never use electrical equipment in wet weather.

Gas, electrical and fire safety

- Get all gas and electrical appliances checked regularly. If you’re having an appliance fitted, always make sure you choose a qualified installer. For electrical installation work, look for membership of the NICEIC; tel. 0870 013 0382 or the Electrical Contractors’ Association (ECA); tel. 020 7313 4800. For gas appliances you must use an
installer registered with CORGI; tel. 0870 401 2300.
Take special care if you are buying second-hand appliances.

- Most people over 60 are entitled to an annual free gas safety check. Contact your gas company for more information. The phone number should be on the back of your bill.

- If you smell gas, ring the emergency number on 0800 111 999.

- Keep electric fires and heaters, including mobile heaters, well away from bedclothes, furniture and curtains.

- If you have an electric blanket, make sure you get it serviced regularly and check for danger signs such as frayed fabric, a worn flex and scorch marks. Unplug your electric blanket when you go to bed, unless you are absolutely sure it is the type that can be left on overnight.

- If you smoke, use deep ashtrays and never smoke in bed.

- It is very important to install a smoke alarm in your home. Choose one bearing the British Standard number BS 5446 and the Kitemark. See our free advice leaflet Fire for more information on smoke alarms, and on fire prevention.

- Do not use energy-saving light bulbs with dimmer switches.

Protect yourself against carbon monoxide

Heaters that burn gas, coal, oil or wood can give off carbon monoxide if they are not working properly. You can’t see or smell carbon monoxide gas, but it is extremely poisonous.

You can buy carbon monoxide detectors; look for the Kitemark and British Standard number BS 7860 or BS EN 5029. Never rely entirely on a carbon monoxide detector; a detector should only be used as an extra safety measure.