Safe as houses

Handy tips to prevent accidents in your home
Did you know that the older you get the more likely you are to have an accident in your home and the more severe your injuries are likely to be?

How many times have you heard people say, “Accidents will happen”? Well, they’re right – accidents will happen, BUT ONLY IF YOU LET THEM. You can take steps to prevent them.

This leaflet contains some tips on simple but effective things you can do to make you safer at home. Some will seem obvious; others you may not have thought of before.

If you slip or trip on the stairs then you obviously have a lot further to fall. This makes stairs and staircases particularly hazardous places.

➢ Make sure the staircase is well lit. Change your light bulb for a brighter one if necessary.

➢ Don’t leave any objects lying around on the stairs.

➢ Make sure the stair carpet is securely fixed and doesn’t slip about.

➢ If you find it difficult to get up and down the stairs, have an extra hand-rail fitted so you can hold on to both sides.

➢ Make sure your shoes or slippers have non-slip soles and are not loose-fitting on your feet.
**Kitchen**

Most accidents happen in the kitchen, especially burns and scalds.

- Keep saucepan handles turned inwards over the cooker. That way you won't accidentally knock them over.

- Don't overfill your kettle. That will make it heavier and you may drop it. Try a cordless kettle which has no wires to get tangled up, or replace your straight lead with a curly one.

- Make sure all the things you need are within easy reach so you don't have to stretch too far.

- Make sure you have plenty of surface space before you start doing anything with hot liquids or foods.

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**Fire**

- Buy a smoke alarm. They cost around £5, are simple to install and could save your life. Choose one which meets British Standard BS5446 Part 1 and carries the Kitemark. The manufacturer's instructions will give you guidance on battery replacement and maintenance.

- If you have a chip pan or deep fryer, never fill it more than one-third full, never leave it unattended and never put food in the pan if the oil begins to smoke. If your chip pan does catch fire, turn off the heat, if you can, and cover the pan with a damp cloth or tea towel. Never throw water onto the fire.

- Open fires should always have a fireguard round them, but never rest clothes or place newspapers on the guard.

- Never leave a lit cigarette unattended and don't smoke in a chair if you think you may doze off in it. Never smoke in bed.
Be especially careful when getting in and out of the bath. For a reasonably low cost you can buy an anti-slip mat that sits firmly on the bottom of the bath and won't slide around when you step on to it. Also, a grab rail can be fitted to the wall for you to hold on to.

An often overlooked type of accident is poisoning. If you are taking any medicine, use it only as directed by your doctor or pharmacist. Never take medicines which have been prescribed for other people, and don't hoard medicines you are no longer using. You can return them to any pharmacist.

Keep yourself fit and active. A lot of people may not realise it, but simple regular daily activities like taking a walk or doing some gardening will help maintain your strength and balance and make you less likely to fall.

CONTACTS
If you need more advice and information, the following organisations may be able to help:

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
Edgbaston Park, 353 Bristol Road, Birmingham B5 7ST
Tel: (0121) 248 2000 for general information and advice on the prevention of accidents.

Age Concern
Astral House, 1268 London Road, London SW16 4EJ
Tel: (0181) 679 8000 or phone your local branch (the number is listed in your telephone directory) for information on services and support for older people.

Help the Aged
St James's Walk, Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0BE
Tel: (0171) 253 0253 for information and services relating to home safety and other issues affecting older people.

Disabled Living Foundation
380-384 Harrow Road, London W9 2HU
Helpline No: 0870 603 9177 (Minicom 0870 603 9176) for information and practical advice on daily living for disabled people, older people and carers.

You can also contact your local Social Services department who may be able to provide assistance in obtaining some of the items mentioned in this leaflet. If you don't know how to get in touch with them, your local doctor's surgery or library should be able to tell you.
OTHER LANGUAGES
This leaflet is also available in the following languages:

➤ Bengali
➤ Gujarati
➤ Punjabi
➤ Urdu
➤ Greek
➤ Turkish
➤ Chinese
➤ Vietnamese

Further copies of this leaflet and any of the above versions can be obtained by writing to:

Department of Health, PO Box 410, Wetherby LS23 7LN
or fax (01937) 845 381