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## Pathways to Home: Home Safety Checklist

**This checklist is provided to assist you with removing safety risks at home, particularly those that may result in a fall. The checklist focuses on areas that you will be using most in your recovery period, but does not evaluate areas such as storage areas or garage. We will assist you in completing checklist with recommendations, but you may need the assistance of a family member to assist with carrying out some of the recommendations.**

Each year, many older Americans are injured in and around their homes. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimates that in 1981, over 622,000 people over age 65 were treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries associated with products they live with and use every day.

CPSC believes that many of these injuries result from hazards that are easy to overlook, but also easy to fix. By spotting these hazards and taking some simple steps to correct them, many injuries might be prevented.

Use this checklist to spot possible safety problems that may be present in your home. Check YES or NO to answer each question. Then go back over the list and take action to correct those items that may need attention.

Keep this checklist as a reminder of safe practices, and use it periodically to re-check your home.

This checklist is organized by areas in the home. However, there are some potential hazards that need to be checked in more than just one area of your home.

These are highlighted at the beginning of the checklist, and short reminders are included in each other section of the checklist.

In all areas of your home, check all electrical and telephone cords; rugs, runners, and mats; telephone areas; smoke detectors; electrical outlets and switches; light bulbs; space heaters; wood-burning stoves; and your emergency exit plan.

## CHECK ALL CORDS

**Question:** Are lamp, extension, and telephone cords placed out of the flow of traffic?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Cords stretched across walkways may cause someone to trip.

- Arrange furniture so that outlets are available for lamps and appliances without the use of extension cords.
- If you must use an extension cord, place it on the floor against a wall where people can not trip over it.
- Move the phone so that telephone cords will not lie where people walk.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Are cords out from beneath furniture and rugs or carpeting?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Furniture resting on cords can damage them, creating fire and shock hazards. Electric cords that run under carpeting may cause a fire.

- Remove cords from under furniture or carpeting
- Replace damaged or frayed cords
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Are cords attached to the walls, baseboards, etc., with nails or staples?  Yes  No

Nails or staples can damage cords, presenting fire and shock hazards.

- Remove nails, staples, etc.
- Check wiring for damage
- Use tape to attach cords to walls or floors.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Are electrical cords in good condition, not frayed or cracked?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Damaged cords may cause a shock or fire.

- Replace frayed or cracked cords
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Do extension cords carry more than their proper load, as indicated by the ratings labeled on the cord and the appliance?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Overloaded extension cords may cause fires. Standard 18 gauge extension cords can carry 1250 watts.

- If the rating on the cord is exceeded because of the power requirements of one or more appliance being used on the cord, change the cord to a higher rated one or unplug some appliances.
- If an extension cord is needed, use one having a sufficient amp or wattage rating.

Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

## CHECK ALL RUGS, RUNNERS, AND MATS

**Question:** Are all small rugs and runners slip-resistant?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* CPSC estimates that in 1982, over 2,500 people 65 and over were treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries that resulted from tripping over rugs and runners. Falls are also the most common cause of fatal injury for older people.

- Remove rugs and runners that tend to slide.
- Apply double-faced adhesive carpet tape or rubber matting to the backs of rugs and runners.
- Purchase rugs with slip-resistant backing.
- Check rugs and mats periodically to see if backing needs to be replaced.
- Place rubber matting under rugs. (Rubber matting that can be cut to size is available.)
- Purchase new rugs with slip-resistant backing.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Note: Over time, adhesive on tape can wear away. Rugs with slip-resistant backing also become less effective as they are washed. Periodically, check rugs and mats to see if new tape or backing is needed.

## CHECK SMOKE DETECTORS

**Question:** Are smoke detectors properly located?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* At least one smoke detector should be placed on every floor or your home.

- Read the instructions that come with the smoke detector for advice on the best place to install it.
- Make sure detectors are placed near bedrooms, either on the ceiling or 6-12 inches below the ceiling on the wall.
- Locate smoke detectors away from air vents.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Do you have properly working smoke detectors?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Many home fire injuries and deaths are caused by smoke and toxic gases, rather than the fire itself. Smoke detectors provide an early warning and can wake you in the event of a fire.

- Purchase a smoke detector if you do not have one.
- Check and replace batteries and bulbs according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Vacuum the grillwork of your smoke detector
- Replace any smoke detectors that cannot be repaired.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

Note: Some fire departments or local governments will provide assistance in acquiring or installing smoke detectors.

## CHECK ELECTRICAL OUTLETS AND SWITCHES

**Question:** Are any outlets and switches unusually warm or hot to the touch?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Unusually warm or hot outlets or switches may indicate that unsafe wiring condition exists.

- Unplug cords from outlets and do not use the switches.
- Have an electrician check the wiring as soon as possible.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Do all outlets and switches have cover plates, so that no wiring is exposed?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Exposed wiring presents a shock hazard.

- Add a cover plate.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Are light bulbs the appropriate size and type for the lamp or fixture?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* A bulb of too high wattage or the wrong type may lead to fire through overheating. Ceiling fixtures, recessed lights, and “hooded” lamps will trap heat.

- Replace with a bulb of the correct type and wattage. (If you do not know the correct wattage, use a bulb no larger than 60 watts.)
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

## CHECK SPACE HEATERS

**Question:** Are heaters that come with a 3-prong plug being used in a 3-hole outlet or with a properly attached adapter?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* The grounding feature provided by a 3-hole receptacle or an adapter for a 2-hole receptacle is a safety feature designed to lessen the risk of shock.

- Never defeat the grounding feature.
- If you do not have a 3-hole outlet, use an adapter to connect the heater’s 3-prong plug. Make sure the adapter ground wire or tab is attached to the outlet.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Are small stoves and heaters placed where they cannot be knocked over, and away from furnishings and flammable materials, such as curtains or rugs?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Heaters can cause fires or serious burns if they cause you to trip or if they are knocked over.

- Relocate heaters away from passageways and flammable materials such as curtains, rugs, furniture, etc.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** If your home has space heating equipment, such as a kerosene heater, a gas heater, or an LP gas heater, do you understand the installation and operating instructions thoroughly?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Un-vented heaters should be used with room doors open or window slightly open to provide ventilation. The correct fuel, as recommended by the manufacture, should always be used. Vented heaters should have proper venting, and the venting system should be checked frequently. Improper venting is the most frequent cause of carbon monoxide poisoning, and older consumers are at special risk.

- Review the installation and operating instructions
- Call your local fire department if you have additional questions.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

### **CHECK WOODBURNING HEATING EQUIPMENT**

**Question:** To the best of your knowledge, is woodburning equipment installed properly?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Woodburning stoves should be installed by a qualified person according to local building codes.

- Local building code officials or fire marshals can provide requirements and recommendations for installation.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

Note: Some insurance companies will not cover fire losses if wood stoves are not installed according to local codes.

### **CHECK THE EMERGENCY EXIT PLAN**

**Question:** Do you have an emergency exit plan and an alternate emergency exit plan in case of a fire?  
 Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Once a fire starts, it spreads rapidly. Since you may not have much time to get out and there may be a lot of confusion, it is important that everyone knows what to do.

- Develop an emergency exit plan.
- Choose a meeting place outside your home so you can be sure that everyone is accounted for.
- Practice the plan from time to time to make sure everyone is capable of escape quickly and safely.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

Note: Remember periodically to re-check your home.

### **KITCHEN**

**Question:** In the kitchen, check the stove area, all electrical cords, lighting, step stool, all throw rugs and mats and the telephone area. Have all areas been check and deemed safe?  Yes  No

- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Are all the handles on the pots and pans toward in toward the stove and not turned out into the room?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Placing handles out into the room increases risks of burns and fire. All handles should be turned towards the center of the stove to prevent injury or harm.

- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

### CHECK THE STOVE AREA

**Question:** Are towels, curtains, and other things that might catch fire located away from the stove?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Placing or storing non-cooking equipment like potholders, dish towels, or plastic utensils on or near the stove may result in fires or burns.

- Store flammable and combustible items away from stove and oven.
- Remove any towels hanging on oven handles. If towels hang close to a burner, change the location of the towel rack.
- If necessary, shorten or remove curtains that could brush against heat sources.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Are all extension cords and appliance cords located away from the sink or stove areas?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Electrical appliances and power cords can cause shock or electrocution if they come in contact with water. Cords can also be damaged by excess heat.

- Move cords and appliances away from sink areas and hot surfaces.
- Move appliances closer to wall outlets or to a different outlet so you won't need extension cords.
- If extension cords must be used, install wiring guides so that cords will not hang near sink, stove or working areas.
- Consider adding new outlets for convenience and safety; ask your electrician to install outlets equipped with ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) to protect against electric shock. A GFCI is a shock-protection device that will detect electrical fault and shut off electricity before serious injury or death occurs.
- For more information on cords, refer to the beginning of the checklist.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Is there good, even lighting over the stove, sink and countertop work areas, especially where food is sliced or cut?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Low lighting and glare can contribute to burns or cuts. Improve lighting by:

- Opening curtains and blinds (unless this causes too much glare).
- Using the maximum wattage bulbs allowed by the fixture (If you do not know the correct wattage for a fixture, use a bulb no larger than 60 watts.)
- Reducing glare by using frosted bulbs, indirect lighting, shades or globes on light fixtures, or partially closing the blinds or curtains.
- Installing additional light fixtures, e.g., under cabinet over countertop lighting.
- Make sure that the bulbs you use are the right type and wattage for the light fixture.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Are kitchen ventilation systems or stove exhaust functioning properly and are they in use while you are cooking?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Indoor air pollutants may accumulate to unhealthful levels in a kitchen where gas or kerosene-fire appliance are in use.

- Use ventilation systems or open windows to clear air of vapors and smoke.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

Remember: Check all of the product areas mentioned at the beginning of the checklist.

### **LIVING ROOM/FAMILY ROOM**

In the living room/family room, check all rugs and runners, electrical and telephone cords, lighting, the fireplace and chimney, the telephone area, and all passageways.

### **CHECK THE TELEPHONE AREA**

For information on the telephone area, refer to the beginning of the checklist.

### **CHECK PASSAGEWAYS**

**Question:** Are hallways, passageways between rooms, and other heavy traffic areas well lit?  
 Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Shadowed or dark areas can hide tripping hazards.

- Use maximum wattage bulb allowed by the fixture. (If you do not know the correct wattage, use a bulb no larger than 60 watts.)
- Install night lights.
- Reduce glare by using frosted bulbs, indirect lighting, shades or globes on light fixtures or partially closing blinds or curtains.
- Consider using additional lamps or light fixtures. Make sure that the bulbs you use are the right type and wattage for the light fixture.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Are exists and passageways kept clear?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Furniture, boxes, or other items could be an obstruction or tripping hazard, especially in the event of an emergency or fire.

- Rearrange furniture to open passageways and walkways
- Remove boxes and clutter.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

Remember: Check all of the product areas mentioned at the beginning of the checklist.

## BATHROOM

In the bathroom, check bathtub and shower areas, water temperature, rugs and mats, lighting, small electrical appliances and storage areas for medications.

### CHECK BATHTUB AND SHOWER AREAS

**Question:** Are bathtubs and showers equipped with non-skid mats, abrasive strips, or surfaces that are not slippery?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Wet soapy tile or porcelain surfaces are especially slippery and may contribute to falls.

- Apply textured strips or appliqués on the floors of tubs and showers.
- Use non-skid mats in the tub and shower, and on the bathroom floor.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Do bathtubs and showers have at least one (preferably two) grab bars?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Grab bars can help you get into and out of your tub or shower, and can help prevent falls.

- Check existing bars for strength and stability, and repair if necessary.
- Attach grab bars, through the tile, to structural supports in the wall, or install bars specifically designed to attach to the sides of the bathtub. If you are not sure how it is done, get someone who is qualified to assist you.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Is the temperature 120 degrees or lower?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Water temperature above 120 degrees can cause tap water scalding.

- Lower the setting on your hot water heater to “Low” or 120 degrees. If you are unfamiliar with the controls of your water heater, ask a qualified person to adjust them for you. If you hot water system is controlled by the landlord, ask the landlord to consider lowering the setting.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

Note: If the water heater does not have a temperature setting, you can use a thermometer to check the temperature of the water at the tap.

- Always check water temperature by hand before entering the bath or shower
- Taking baths, rather than showers, reduces the risk of scald from suddenly changing water temperatures.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

## CHECK LIGHTING

**Question:** Is a light switch located near the entrance to the bathroom?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* A light switch near the door will prevent you from walking through a dark area.

- Install a night light. Inexpensive lights that plug into outlets are available.
- Consider replacing the existing switch with a “glow switch” that can be seen in the dark.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

## CHECK SMALL ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES

**Question:** Are small electrical appliances such as hair dryers, shavers, curling irons, etc., unplugged when not in use?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Even an appliance that is not turned on, such as a hairdryer, can be potentially hazardous if it is left plugged in. If it falls into water in a sink or bathtub while plugged in, it could cause a lethal shock.

- Unplug all small appliances when not in use.
- Never reach into water to retrieve an appliance that has fallen in without being sure the appliance is unplugged.
- Install a GFCI in your bathroom outlet to protect against electric shock.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

## CHECK MEDICATIONS

**Question:** Are all medicines stored in the containers that they came in and are they clearly marked?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Medications that are not clearly and accurately labeled can be easily mixed up. Taking the wrong medicine or missing a dose you need, can be dangerous.

- Be sure that all containers are clearly marked with the contents, doctor’s instructions, expiration date, and patient name.
- Dispose of outdated medicines properly.
- Request non-child-resistant closures from your pharmacist only when you cannot use child-resistant closures.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Note:** Many poisonings occur when children visiting grandparents go through the medicine cabinet or grandmothers purse. In homes where grandchildren or other youngsters are frequent visitors, medicines should be purchased in containers with child-resistant caps, and the caps properly closed after each use. Store all your medicines out of the reach of children.

**Remember:** Check all of the product areas mentioned at the beginning of the checklist.

## BEDROOMS

In the bedroom, check all rugs and runners, electrical and telephone cords, and areas around beds.

### CHECK AREAS AROUND BEDS

**Question:** Are lamps or light switches within read of each bed?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Lamps or switches located close to each bed will enable people getting up at night to see where they are going.

- Rearrange furniture closer to switches or move lamps closer to beds.
- Install night lights.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Are ash strays, smoking materials or other fire sources (heaters, hot plates, teapots, etc) located away from beds or bedding?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Burns are a leading cause of accidental death among seniors. Smoking in bed is a major contributor to this problem. Among mattress and bedding fire related deaths in a recent year, 42% were to persons 65 or older.

- Remove sources of heat or flame from areas around beds.
- Don't smoke in bed.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Is anything covering your electric blanket when in use?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* "Tucking in" electric blankets or placing additional coverings on top of them can cause excessive heat buildup that can start a fire.

- Do not tuck in your electric blanket
- Use electric blankets according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Don't allow anything on top of the blanket while it is in use. (This includes other blankets or comforters, even pets sleeping on top of the blanket).
- Don't set electric blankets so high that they could burn someone who falls asleep while they are on.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Do you ever go to sleep with your heating pad on?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Never go to sleep with a heating pad if it is turned on because it can cause serious burns even at a relatively low setting.

- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Is there a telephone close to your bed?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* In case of an emergency, it is important to be able to reach the telephone without getting out of bed.

- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

## STAIRS

For all stairways, check lighting, handrails, and the condition of the steps and coverings.

### CHECK LIGHTING

**Question:** Are stairs well lighted?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Stairs should be lighted so that each step, particularly the step edges can be clearly seen while going up and down the stairs. The lighting should not produce glare or shadows along the stairway.

- Use the maximum wattage bulb allowed by the light fixture. (If you do not know the correct wattage, use a bulb no larger than 60 watts.)
- Reduce glare by using frosted bulbs, indirect lighting, shades or globes on light fixtures, or partially closing blinds and curtains.
- Have a qualified person add additional light fixtures. Make sure that the bulbs you use are the right type and wattage for the light fixture.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Are light switches located at both the top and bottom of the stairs?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Even if you are very familiar with the stairs, lighting is an important factor in preventing falls. You should be able to turn on the lights before you use the stairway from either end.

- If no other light is available, keep on operating flashlight in a convenient location at the top and bottom of the stairs.
- Install nightlights at nearby outlets.
- Consider installing switches at the top and bottom of the stairs.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Do the steps allow secure footing?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Worn treads or worn or loose carpeting can lead to insecure footing, resulting in slips or falls.

- Try to avoid wearing only socks or smooth-soled shoes or slippers when using the stairs.
- Make certain the carpet is firmly attached to the steps all along the stairs.
- Consider refinishing or replacing worn treads, or replacing worn carpeting.
- Paint outside steps with paint that has a rough texture, or use abrasive strips.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Are steps even and of the same size and height?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Even a small difference in step surfaces or riser heights can lead to falls.

- Mark any steps that are especially narrow or have risers that are higher or lower than the others. Be especially careful of these steps when using the stairs.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Are the coverings on the steps in good condition?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Worn or torn coverings or nails sticking out from coverings could snag your foot or cause you to trip.

- Repair coverings.
- Remove coverings.
- Replace coverings.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Can you clearly see the edges of the steps?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* Falls may occur if the edges of the steps are blurred or hard to see.

- Paint edges of outdoor steps white to see them better at night.
- Add extra lighting.
- If you plan to carpet your stairs, avoid deep pile carpeting or patterned or dark-colored carpeting that can make it difficult to see the edges of the steps clearly.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

**Question:** Is anything stored on the stairway, even temporarily?  Yes  No

*Recommendation:* People can trip over objects left on stairs, particularly in the event of an emergency or fire.

- Remove all objects from stairway.
- Noted recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_