

5 TIPS for caregivers

SAFETY IN THE HOME

As caregivers, we all want to keep our loved ones safe. According to the National Safety Council, the most common causes of unintentional injuries for older adults are falls, motor vehicle accidents, choking, poisoning, or fire related injuries. The good news is that many of these injuries are preventable! In honor of National Safety Month, here are 5 tips for keeping your loved one safe in the home.

1 Clear the clutter.

The most common cause of injury or death for older adults is a fall in the home, but many falls can be prevented with a few simple changes. As far as in the home itself, add lighting and night-lights, clear the clutter, and make sure stairs and handrails are clear and accessible. Personally, certain health problems and medications can increase fall risk, so talk with the doctor to see if any recent concerns could be affecting your loved ones' balance and coordination, or if medications might cause dizziness or confusion. Get a regular eye exam too to make sure the person can clearly see where they're walking. And don't be afraid for them to get up and move. Physical activity strengthens muscles, increases flexibility, and improves balance, which all actually decreases the risk of falls.

2 Still driving?

While statistically drivers with dementia are not in more crashes than other elderly drivers, we do know that poor driving performance increases with the severity of the disease. It's not worth the risk! If you notice your loved one forgetting how to locate familiar places, failing to observe traffic signs, driving at inappropriate speeds, or generally making slow or poor decisions when driving, it may be time to consider if they should still be driving. This is a very difficult topic for many families, as it can signal a major loss of independence for the individual, not to mention the increased responsibility for others who now may need to provide

transportation. While you may feel like Scrooge if you're the one to take away the keys, ultimately it is about the safety of your loved one (and others!) on the road.

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3 No joking at mealtime.

Choking during mealtime is a real concern for older adults, and the risks increase with age. Not chewing food properly is the most common cause of choking; wearing dentures, and difficulty with swallowing also increase risks. Avoid harder to chew foods such as peanut butter, meats, soft foods like cookies and cakes, and larger pieces of fruit, and encourage your loved one to eat slowly. You do the talking and save the jokes for after dinner; talking or laughing while eating can cause choking. If a choking incident has already occurred, talk with the doctor. Sometimes the incident can cause damage to the airway that might make future choking incidents more likely.

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4 Manage the meds.

Keeping an eye on your loved one's medication is extremely important, not only ensure they're taking the medication they need, but to ensure they're taking the right amount of medication they need. It goes without saying, but make sure all medications are taken as prescribed. When caring for a loved one with memory impairment, store all medications in a safe place, and properly dispose of any unused or expired medications so unnecessary pills aren't lying around. While you want to make sure you always have enough, be careful not to refill prescriptions too soon for the same reason; having too many pills available could cause a problem if they were accidentally taken all at once. If your loved one takes over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, or supplements, have your pharmacist check for any interactions with other prescriptions.

5 Change your clocks? Change your alarms!

The easiest way to prevent injuries from fire or smoke is to ensure your smoke detectors are all working properly. If you don't already, you should have a smoke detector on each level of your home, including the basement, and outside of bedrooms. Change the batteries once a year. Pick a day you can remember (Day Light Savings, or New Year's Day for example) to change the batteries each year, and test them once a month. These simple tasks can keep everyone sleeping safer at night.



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