

Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”

Fire Safety at Home—Unhealthy Air

Americans over the age of 65 are one of the groups at greatest risk of dying in a fire. On average, every year almost 1,000 Americans older than 65 die in fires. People over the age of 80 die in fires at a rate three times higher than the rest of the population. Caregivers can help prevent these tragedies by taking steps to reduce the chance of the person in their care being killed or injured by a fire.

Why Seniors Are at Risk for Fire Death and Injuries

- ☑ **Alzheimer’s disease and dementia** can impair a person’s vision, depth perception, hearing, sense of smell and sensation to heat, as well as their judgment. These issues make it difficult to respond to an emergency and pose an enormous threat should a fire occur.
- ☑ **Medication side effects** may affect a senior’s ability to be alert and make quick decisions.
- ☑ **Physical disabilities** may impair a senior’s ability to take quick action.
- ☑ **Vision or hearing loss** can prevent individuals from noticing fires or the causes of fires or hearing alarms.
- ☑ **Seniors who live alone** have no one to help them put out or escape from a fire.



The Big Four Fire Starters

1. **Smoking.** Many seniors or their visitors still smoke. **Unsafe smoking habits lead the cause of fire deaths among older Americans.** Never leave smoking materials unattended. Use wide-lipped “safety ashtrays.” Douse ashtrays with water and empty them into a metal container before going to bed. Never smoke in bed or on upholstered furniture. Check all furniture and carpets for fallen cigarettes and ashes before leaving home or going to sleep. Set your cigarette lighter on “low” to prevent burns. Keep all smoking materials out of bedrooms. Burning bedclothes can create a fire from which



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escape is impossible and toxic fumes from the smoke can kill.

Never allow smoking near an oxygen tank.

- 2. Heating equipment.** Especially dangerous are kerosene heaters, woodstoves and electric space heaters. Buy only UL approved heaters and use only the manufacturer's recommended fuel for each heater. Do *not* use electric space heaters in the bathroom or other wet areas. Keep paper and fabric away from heat sources. Once a year, have chimneys, fireplaces, wood stoves and furnaces serviced. **Never use a cook stove to heat your home.**
- 3. Cooking.** The third leading cause of fire deaths. For the elderly, the kitchen can be a dangerous place. **Most kitchen fires occur when cooking food is left unattended.** If you must leave the kitchen while cooking, turn off the burner. If there's something in the oven, check it every 15 minutes. Use a bell timer to remind you. If you leave the

kitchen briefly, carry a spoon or potholder with you to remind you to return. If a fire starts in a pan, put a lid on it. Never throw water on a grease fire. Keep flammable liquids, like alcohol and cooking oils, and paper away from the stove. Keep a fire extinguisher in the kitchen (but not right next to the stove) and learn how to use it. **Never cook while wearing robes or other loose fitting garments that can contact hot surfaces.**

- 4. Faulty wiring.** Many seniors live in older homes with wiring problems. Regularly inspect extension cords for exposed wires or loose plugs. Unplug them when not in use. If you need to plug in two or three appliances, lamps, etc., get a UL-approved unit that has built-in circuit breakers. **If you see or smell smoke or sparks coming from any electrical appliance or outlet, shut off the main breaker and call an electrician at once.**

Source: U.S. Fire Administration; Home Safety Council

Unhealthy Air

Any kind of air pollution inside or outside of the home should be avoided, including dust, smoke, fumes from wood or coal-burning stoves, and strong odors in general. Some people are highly allergic to mold and may have trouble breathing if they are exposed to it.

"High pollution" days are usually announced on radio, television, and in the newspapers. If high pollution is expected, people with chronic lung disease should remain indoors with the windows and doors closed until the pollution in the outside air is cleared. Your home is probably the most important place to keep smoke-free. Keeping seniors (and kids) far away from smoke can help lower their chances of having respiratory infections, severe asthma, cancer, and many other serious conditions.

Taking Care of Yourself—Meditation

Your journey as a caregiver will be less stressful if you take up a practice of daily meditation. Most people fail at meditation because they think meditation means clearing your mind of thoughts. Instead of emptying your mind of thoughts, just observe them. Don't focus on any of your thoughts and don't fight with any of them. An easy way to do that is to label each one as it bubbles up—sad thought, happy thought, angry thought, depressed thought, to-do list thought—and let it go and then label the next one that appears. It is not important how long you sit with your eyes closed and observe your thoughts—5 minutes will do, especially to start. What makes meditation effective at reducing stress is the practice of meditation, doing it every day. It's only 5 or 10 minutes, but the cumulative effect over just a few weeks is noticeable.



Inspiration

It's not the load that breaks you down, it's the way you carry it.
~ Lou Holtz

Live Life Laughing!



Memory Care

Loss of Smell

A loss of or decrease in smell is common in people with Alzheimer's disease. Therefore, they may not be able to smell smoke. Install smoke alarms inside each bedroom, outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home, including the basement. Smoke alarms can double the chance of surviving a fire by providing early warning and time for escape.

Caregiving in The Comfort of Home®

Our Purpose

To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

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SAFETY TIPS— The Home Escape Plan

Seniors and people with disabilities have physical limitations and a decreased ability to react in a fire emergency. Plan the fire escape around the person's capabilities.

- **Keep three essential items by your bedside:** Your eyeglasses, whistle and a telephone.
- **Plan your escape route:** Practice getting out.
- **Check windows from which escape is planned:** Make sure your exits allow you to exit!
- **If using a wheelchair or walker:** Map out escape routes that are wide enough to get through.
- **Discuss your escape plans** with family or neighbors.
- **If you have impairments** that might make it difficult for you to escape from fire, let your local fire department know.