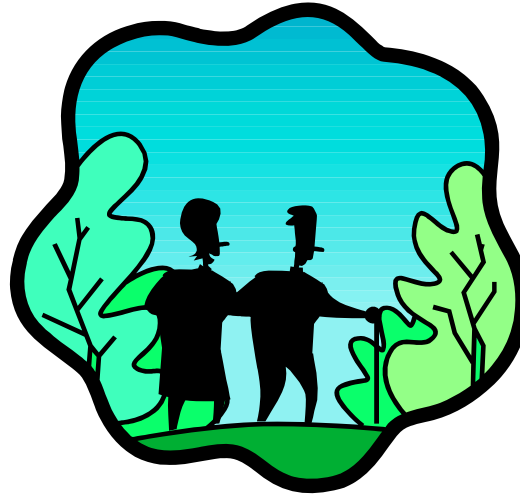


# Household Safety for Seniors



*County of Bucks  
Department of Consumer Protection/  
Weights and Measures*

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>General Safety Standards</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Preventing Falls</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Kitchen Safety</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Stairway and Hallway Safety</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Living Room Safety</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Bathroom Safety</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Bedroom Safety</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Outdoor Safety</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Pathway and Garden Safety</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Fire Safety</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Safe Footwear</b>	<b>14</b>

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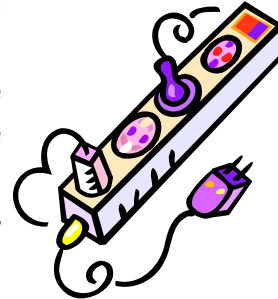
***The material in this brochure  
is for informational purposes only.  
It is meant to give you general information  
and not specific legal advice.***

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**General Safety Standards**

First, consider whether your home meets the following general safety standards:

- Emergency numbers are posted **IN LARGE PRINT** by each telephone.
- Appliances, lamps, and cords are clean and in good condition. Replace any electrical cords that are showing signs of wear.
- Make sure you do not overload outlets by plugging in too many items.
- The thermostat on the water heater should be set at 100 degrees or lower to prevent scalding.
- A list of medications should be posted on the refrigerator, and all medications stored in a safe place according to the instructions on the package label.



- Carpeting and rugs should not be worn or torn. Small, loose rugs should have rubber backing or nonskid strips on the back, and not be placed in traffic areas. Use non-skid wax on uncarpeted floors.

- Use strong and/or even lighting throughout your house or apartment.
- Be sure that doors can be unlocked from the outside in case of an emergency. This is especially important in the bathroom and bedroom.
- Think about wearing an alarm device that will bring help if you fall and cannot get up.

### **Preventing Falls**

Here are three things YOU can do to prevent falls:

- ***Begin a regular exercise program.*** Exercise is one of the most important ways to lower your chance of falling. It makes you stronger and helps you to feel better. Exercises that improve balance and coordination, such as Tai Chi, are the most helpful.



Lack of exercise leads to weakness and increases your chance of falling.

Ask your doctor or health-care provider about the best type of exercise program for you.

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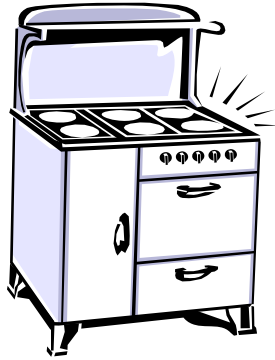
- ***Have your health care provider review your medicines.*** Have your doctor or pharmacist review all of the medicines you take, even over-the-counter medicines. As you get older, the way medications work in your body can change. Some medications, or combinations of medications, can make you sleepy or dizzy and cause you to fall.
- ***Have your vision checked.*** Poor vision can increase your chances of falling.

### **Kitchen Safety**

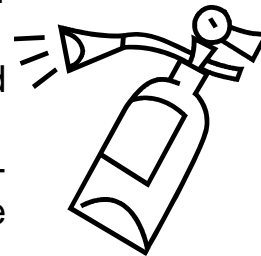
Be kitchen wise! Look at your kitchen area and use the following guidelines to determine safety:



- Don't put items that you use frequently on high shelves. Keep them near waist level.
  - If you must use a step stool, use one with a bar to hold onto. Never use a chair as a step stool.
  - If you have a gas stove, it is equipped with a pilot light. Make sure it has an automatic cut-off in the event of flame failure.
  - The stove should not be located under a window in which curtains are hanging.
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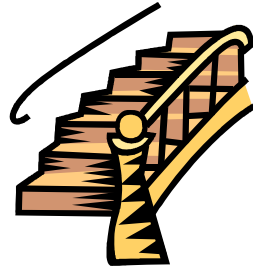


- The stove's exhaust hood should have filters that can be easily removed for cleaning, and the exhaust system should discharge directly to the outside or through ducts to the outside, not into the attic or other unused space.
- Store hazardous household agents out of the reach of children.
- Don't leave the kitchen while you are cooking. If you must leave the kitchen to answer the doorbell or talk on the telephone, set a timer or take a spoon with you to remind yourself that you are cooking, or turn off the stove until you can return.
- When cooking, turn pan handles away from other burners and the edge of the stove.
- Disconnect small appliances when not in use.
- Keep knives in a knife rack or drawer.
- Keep countertops cleared of all unnecessary items.
- Wipe up grease and liquid spills promptly.
- Know where the fire extinguisher is. Store it in a place that is easy to get to.



### **Stairway and Hallway Safety**

Now consider whether your stairways and hallways are safe for use.

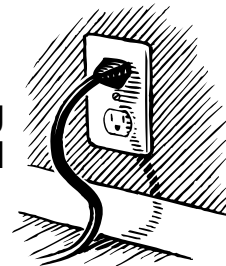


- Steps should be in good condition and free of objects.
- Steps should have nonskid strips, or the carpeting on them should be securely fastened and free of fraying and holes.
- Place smoke alarms in hallways and near sleeping areas.
- Handrails should be sturdy and securely fastened, and balusters should be close enough to prevent a small child from getting his/her head stuck between them.
- Light switches should be located at both ends of long hallways and at the top and bottom of staircases. Check periodically to make sure that lights work.
- Doors should not swing out over stairs.

### **Living Room Safety**

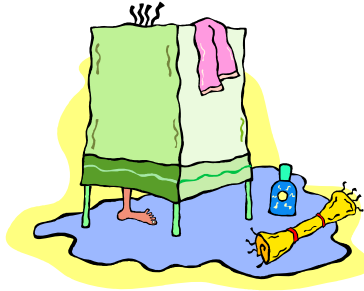
Check your living room for these features:

- Electric cords are placed along walls—not under rugs—and away from traffic areas.
- Furniture is sturdy and secure.



### **Bathroom Safety**

- Install grab bars by the toilet and tub/shower area. Toilet frames, arm rests or commodes can be attached to or placed around the toilet.
- Wipe up spills from the shower immediately, or carpet the entire bathroom to avoid slips or falls.
- Use a shower seat or shower hose if you cannot stand safely while showering.
- Avoid using electrical equipment in the bathroom as much as possible. Equipment coming in contact with water can cause electrical shock.
- Avoid using bath oil in the tub or shower.



### **Bedroom Safety**

- Put a good, sturdy lamp next to the bed, or locate the bed next to a light switch. This makes it easier to find your way to the bathroom at night or locate a needed item without risking a fall.
  - Put a stable nightstand next to the bed. This provides a good place for your glasses and other necessary items within easy reach.
-

- For a frail or elderly person who is able to use one, place a phone on the bedside table. It will be extremely helpful in the event of an emergency, and just knowing it is there can alleviate anxiety and fear.
- Use a nightlight to help relieve feelings of disorientation when awakening during the night. Some nightlights go on by themselves after dark.
- Keep clear pathways around the bed, to the door, and to the bathroom.
- Mount grab bars, railings or rope in hallways if the bedroom is not easily accessible to the bathroom or living areas. Heavy pieces of furniture can also be strategically placed to serve as support for a frail person to get from room to room.
- Remove casters on beds, tables and chairs. Unintended movement of furniture used for support can result in a fall.
- Fix bed height so the older person can get on and off easily.



- Use a hot water bottle for warmth at bedtime. Avoid using heating pads and electric blankets when sleeping. The elderly are less sensitive to heat and may become inadvertently overheated or burned.
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- For elderly smokers, arrange a specific safe place in the house where smoking is allowed. Discourage smoking in bed or while sitting on upholstered furniture.
- Draw up and practice an evacuation plan in case of fire or other emergency.

### **Outdoor Safety**

- For an unsteady gait, use a walker or cane.
- Stand on the sidewalk, not in the street, when waiting to cross.
- Look both ways before entering a crosswalk. This is especially important if you suffer from diminished hearing.
- Use sunglasses and a hat or cap to prevent glare.
- If you must walk at night, wear white or beige clothing, use reflector tapes on shoes and clothing, or use reflective garments in orange or yellow.
- Do NOT go out alone at night! Find a friend or companion. Avoid dark areas, and do NOT carry valuables.



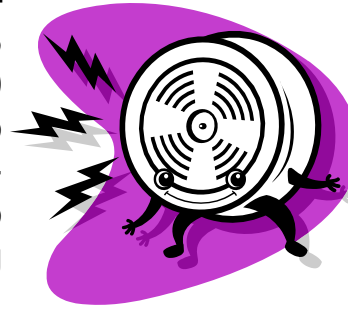
### **Pathway and Garden Safety**

- Hedges, trees, or shrubs should not obscure the view of the street from the driveway.
- Make sure garage doors are of a type that you can operate easily, even when snow is piled against them, and that the garage is adequately ventilated.
- Large trees should be healthy and well-maintained, with no dead limbs.
- Store garden and lawn equipment safely.
- Toxic materials such as pesticides and fertilizer should be kept in their own labeled containers, not in unlabeled jars or bottles.



## **Fire Safety**

- **Smoke Alarms—** Approximately 75 percent of the 1300 senior citizens who die in fires nationwide each year do not have working smoke alarms in their homes. Smoke alarms are designed to wake you up if a fire starts in your home at night. It is a dangerous risk to assume that the smell of smoke or the heat of the fire will wake you up. Just a few breaths of smoke will endanger your life, and by the time the heat wakes you up, your means of escape may be gone.
- **Avoid Smoking Indoors—**If you must smoke indoors, use large ashtrays. Never smoke while drowsy or while in bed. It is very dangerous to fall asleep with a lit cigarette, cigar, or pipe in your hands.
- **Plan your escape—**It is a good idea to keep a pair of slippers, eyeglasses, and a flashlight by your bed. If you hear the smoke alarm go off at night, you will be prepared to get out quickly. Once you hear the sound of the smoke alarm, every second counts for your escape.



Make a plan that includes two safe ways out of every room to help you get out and away from the fire. Remember that fire spreads very quickly. There is no time to gather belongings, and pets are usually able to get out on their own.

### **Safe Footwear**

- Choose shoes that are flexible and easily molded to the feet. Natural materials such as suede or leather are cooler than man-made materials such as plastic or nylon. Shoes with Velcro fastenings are easier to put on and take off.
- The soles of shoes should be made of material that grips the floor, such as corrugated rubber or neolyte. Leather, wood, cork, or crepe-soled shoes may crack and cause falls.



**Important Phone Numbers**

**Crimes Against Older Adults  
24-Hour Hotline  
1-800-490-8505**

**Area Agency on Aging  
215-348-6116**

**Network of Victim Assistance  
(NOVA)  
215-348-5664**

*Provided as a public service by the  
Bucks County Commissioners*

*Charles H. Martin, Chairman  
James F. Cawley, Esq., Vice-Chairman  
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