

Caregiver Assistance News

“Caring for You - Caring for Others”

Area Agency on Aging District 7, Inc.

*Serving Adams, Brown, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, Lawrence,
Pike, Ross, Scioto and Vinton Counties in Ohio*

www.aaa7.org **Helping You Age Better!**



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Be Safe from Fire

Every day in America on average, seven people die and many more are injured in home fires. Most of those injuries could be prevented with some safety steps. Older adults are more than twice as likely to die in a home fire than other age groups. People over the age of 80 die in fires at a rate three times higher than the rest of the population. Poor vision, limited mobility, hearing loss, a reduced sense of smell, medication side effects (drowsiness) and dementia all contribute to the danger of fire for seniors.

The Home Fire Escape Plan

More than 50 percent of home fire deaths occur at night when most people are sleeping. People with disabilities may have physical limitations and a decreased ability to react in a fire emergency. Special fire warning devices are available, such as smoke alarms with a vibrating pad or flashing light for the deaf and hard of hearing. Draw a fire escape plan on paper and plan the escape around the person's capabilities.



- Three essential bedside items: eyeglasses, whistle and a phone. You need your glasses to see how to escape from fire and avoid injury. The whistle lets people know where you are so that you can be rescued and helps you warn others of fire. If you are trapped, the phone will let you call for help. Remember, your first priority is to get out of the building. Don't stop to call the fire department until you are safely outside.
- Plan your escape route: know two ways out of every room - primary and back-up routes mapped out for each room. Ensure escape routes are wide enough for a walker or wheelchair and remove items that may block your way out. Practice getting out. If you have practiced escape routes, your memory and instinct will help you move in the right direction.
- Check windows from which escape is planned: can you open the window? Be sure exits allow you to exit!
- Share your escape plans with your family, the building manager or neighbors.
- If you have impairments that might make it difficult for you to escape from fire, let your local fire department and other emergency service providers know. Many departments issue special window stickers to mark the bedrooms of people with special needs.

Source: FEMA.gov; National Fire Protection Association

The Big Four Fire Starters

1) Smoking

Smokers are seven times more likely than nonsmokers to be fire victims. Smoking materials are the number one cause of home fires that kill seniors. Practice safer smoking habits: never leave smoking materials (cigarettes, cigars, pipes, lighters) unattended. Use wide-lipped "safety ashtrays." Douse ashtrays with water and empty them into a metal container before going to bed. Make it a RULE to never smoke in bed, while lying down, or on upholstered furniture - especially when you are drowsy or taking medication that makes you sleepy. 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 escape is impossible and toxic fumes from the smoke can kill. Never allow smoking near an oxygen tank.



2) Heating Equipment

Space heaters are responsible for two out of every three home-heating fires. Buy only UL approved heaters and use only the manufacturer's recommended fuel for each heater. Use heaters with automatic shut-off features. Do not use electric space heaters in the bathroom or other wet areas. Give space heaters space. Place heaters at least three feet from any combustible material, such as bedding or furniture. Once a year, have chimneys, fireplaces, wood stoves and furnaces serviced. Never use a cook stove to heat your home.

3) Cooking

Cooking is 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. Wear snug clothing without loose, dangling sleeves; don't leave paper towels and plastic wrap near the stove; and remove flammable liquids from the kitchen. Never leave the stove unattended.

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

DON'T FALL - BE SAFE!

Arrange to have leaves, snow and ice removed from stairs and walkways. Use salt or sand throughout the winter months. If you use a cane, replace the rubber tip before it is worn smooth. Medical supply stores carry an ice pick-like attachment that fits onto the end of the cane to help keep you from slipping when you walk.



TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Getting Perspective - Let Go of Added Stress

Taking care of someone's needs can be so demanding that nearly every caregiver can feel stress. On top of caregiving chores, one added cause of stress is our own personalities. Our individual personalities can cause some of us to feel more stress in the same situation than others. Ask yourself if you possess any of the following traits. If you do, understand that they may be increasing your stress level, and go easy on yourself.



- Perfectionism and high expectations of oneself or others
- Difficulty saying no and difficulty delegating responsibility to others
- Too much self-sacrifice; seeing oneself as a "super" person and not accepting one's own limitations
- Feeling more comfortable with giving than receiving

Source: Rosalynn Carter, Helping Yourself Help Others: A Book for Caregivers

It's Time to Be Winter Ready - Winter STEADY

Winter can be a lovely time of year, but snow, sleet and icy roads and walkways can make getting around not only challenging, but dangerous. Falls are the leading cause of injury-related hospital visits, and wintry conditions raise the potential of taking a life-changing tumble.

Here are some simple tips from the STEADY U Ohio initiative to help you be Winter STEADY:

- Allow extra time to get to places in the winter. If you don't feel safe, ask for help.
- When conditions are icy, walk with a buddy or carry a cell phone.
- Assume that surfaces that look slippery are slippery and find another way.
- Keep rock salt, sand, and a shovel available near entrances to your home.
- Carry a small bag of sand or rock salt in your coat pocket for when you are away from home.
- Don't try to walk in more than an inch of snow to avoid tripping.
- Bundle up, but make sure you can see in all directions and move freely.
- Wear winter boots that fit well and provide more traction than tennis or dress shoes.
- Check that the rubber tips on canes and walkers are in good repair.
- Increase the lighting in your home with extra lamps and by using the highest-wattage bulbs recommended for your fixtures.
- Keep space heaters, cords and blankets out of walkways. If you must use throw rugs on cold floors, secure them to the floor with tape.



Visit www.steadyu.ohio.gov for more tips and resources to prevent falls.



Area Agency on Aging District 7, Inc.

F32-URG, PO Box 500 • 160 Dorsey Drive • Rio Grande, OH 45674-0500

Toll-Free Number: (800) 582-7277 • TTY: 711 (Relay Ohio)

Website: www.aaa7.org • E-Mail: info@aaa7.org • Facebook: www.facebook.com/AreaAgencyOnAgingDistrict7

Safety Tips - Winter Driving

The leading cause of death during winter storms is from automobile accidents. Winterize your car before winter. Drive only if it is absolutely necessary. If you must drive - travel in the day, don't travel alone, stay on main roads, and avoid back road shortcuts. Keep the gas tank full which will keep the fuel line from freezing.



- Keep a winter emergency supplies kit in your car.
- Listen for National Weather Service travel advisories. Do not travel in low visibility conditions.
- Avoid traveling on ice-covered roads, overpasses, and bridges if at all possible.
- Let someone know your destination and when you expect to arrive. Ask them to notify authorities if you are late.
- Never pour hot water on your windshield to remove ice or snow; it may shatter.
- Don't rely only on your car to provide sufficient heat; the car may break down. Keep extra clothing in the car.