



GUIDE TO IN-HOME SENIOR SAFETY

**Homewatch
CareGivers®**

Is your loved-one safe at home?

Most seniors want to age at home, where they feel safe and close to the things that they value. However, falls are the leading cause of death and injuries among Americans over age 65, according to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. More than one third of all seniors --or about 11 million people-- fall each year, resulting in almost 12,000 deaths. Of survivors, 50 percent lose their mobility, and 40 percent, their independence, forever.

The elderly are also 2.5 times more likely to die in a residential fire than the rest of the population. Cooking, open flames, smoking, and heating caused more fires that resulted in injuries among the elderly than other fire causes.

Dana Wimberly, an RN that has worked in the health care industry for over 9 years and with Homewatch CareGivers for over 4, says, "With the appropriate supervision and consistent in-home safety evaluations, you can make it safe for your senior loved one to live at home. Fatalities and injuries can be avoided if you take the right steps in ensuring your loved one's safety."

Determining if your loved one is safe at home can be overwhelming and frustrating. Homewatch CareGivers' Guide to In-Home Senior Safety is here for you to evaluate your loved one's home and to help create a safe and healthy living environment. Evaluating your loved one's living environment needs to be done on a regular basis as their capabilities to live independently will continue to change.

William Christner, a caregiver for Homewatch CareGivers in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, says the most important thing is to, "Look at the condition that your mom and dad are living in. Remember that their senses are fading. Brighten it up. Be aware of clutter."

He also says to not look at the house as a place they live, but as a place they want to stay.

"Most elderly are comfortable with the way things are. Discuss the changes with them before you do anything, but make sure they know that any changes are to make life easier for them."

One of the major reasons that a senior will cover up a loss of capabilities is the perceived threat of losing his/her right to live at home. Assuring them that you are working with them to make their lives easier will alleviate their fears. Please do not take any action without having an honest talk with your parent. If these conversations are troubling, try to engage a third-party advocate who can help you both through these conversations.

ALL LIVING AREAS

As your parent ages, you need to be aware of specific situations that could cause an accident and possible hospitalization. Try to look at your parent's house from a safety standard from now on. Make note of changes you make and be ready to continually do safety updates. Remember that your parents are used to living a certain way and are comfortable with the way things are. They need to be involved in any changes you make.

Make sure you solve the following hazards for all living areas:

Problem: *Dimly lit rooms and hallways present a problem everywhere.*

Solution: All rooms should be well lit. Remember that your parents' senses have changed. As we age our senses lessen, especially sight, hearing and smell. Although it may seem like comfortable lighting to you, your parent may be having trouble seeing. Of course, trouble with vision leads to avoidable injuries. If the house seems dim, change all the light-bulbs to a higher wattage. Also make sure that there are ample reading lights in the bedroom, kitchen and sitting room for reading pleasure.

Problem: *Loose throw rugs, clutter on the floor and small pets can become problematic. Are the entry and exits cluttered and/or blocked?*

Solution: Remove clutter. Throw it away if necessary, but make sure you discuss it with your parent. Remember that your aging parent will not always lift his/her feet when walking. In addition, he/she will be using walking aids, such as a cane or walker. There should be enough room to turn around, and all doorways should have a clear walkway. Remove all throw rugs, electrical cords and low-lying decorations to avoid falls.

Although pets provide comfort and companionship, be aware that the pet may no longer be receiving the care it deserves and could potentially cause injury. Have an honest conversation about the pet, its needs, and your parent's burden in caring for the pet. Offer to find third-party help with the animal or help find it a new home.

Problem: *Alert systems may be old and unreliable.*

Solution: There should be a working smoke detector and a carbon monoxide detector somewhere in the house, preferably by the kitchen and near the boiler room. Make sure there are working batteries in the devices and available in the house as well, and offer to change them as necessary. Homewatch CareGivers offers remote care monitoring which can be connected to alert systems that can help your senior loved one easily connect to the right person in case of emergency.



Problem: *Electric extension cords on the floor in walkways and/or over-loaded outlets.*

Solution: Extension cords are something that need to be moved out of the way, either behind furniture or run along the walls. If the outlet is over-loaded, switch to a surge protector. This will help prevent fires or power outages.

Candy Parks, a caregiver for over 36 years, says that when rearranging a loved one's home, you should be sensitive and have a casual conversation to break the ice. "Ask your parents to make suggestions and try to incorporate what they say. Remind them why you are doing it and that what you are doing will make it easier for them to stay at home." She also says that having a third-party advocate is important to make this conversation go more smoothly. "Another person present allows your parent to be honest about their needs. This will help you make suggestions without aggravating your parents' fear of losing their home and their independence."

BEDROOM

As your parents age, they will feel more comfortable and safe in the bedroom. It will be easier for them to stay in this room if they have trouble walking or if they are suffering from an age-related disease. Because of the amount of time they will spend there, you need to have a heightened awareness of safety issues.

Make sure you solve the following hazards in the bedroom:

Problem: *The room is cluttered and your parent has problems finding glasses, water, tissues, lights etc.*

Solution: Bring in a small night stand with a drawer where they can put all of their necessities. Also help your parent arrange a walkway in the room to avoid falls. Once again, you will need to clear clutter from all walkways and make sure that they have room to turn around.

Problem: *Disorientation can occur when awoken in the middle of the night.*

Solution: Provide a nightlight or touch-light on the night stand or near the bed. Make sure there is no clutter around the foot of the bed or by the door.

Problem: *Your parent struggles to get dressed in the morning; he/she does not change clothing or is often wearing something dirty.*

Solution: Remember that there are several reasons your parent may be having trouble. Often, shaky hands or problems with vision are related to certain age-related diseases. Make sure that your parent's wardrobe is organized and easily accessible. Offer to help him/her buy new clothing that is easier to wear, with few buttons and more comfort. If your parent is struggling because of fatigue, bring in a sturdy chair in which they can sit when they get dressed. This is an opportunity to ask them if they need help getting dressed and doing laundry. This is a good time to talk about bringing in a third-party advocate to help them during times when you are not available.

BATHROOM

With slick floors and water everywhere, it is easy to see why the majority of falls happen in the bathroom. This is the most important area of which to be aware. Make sure you solve the following hazards in the bathroom:

Problem: *The bathtub is standard (often these tubs are very low to the ground, do not have assistance bars to get in and out, and is the model that came with the house).*

Solution: There are several different layers to this situation. If your parent can still shower or take a bath without assistance, install non-slip strips or a mat. The next step is to add grab bars and a shower bench. If there is a door on the shower, make sure it opens and closes easily to ensure safe entry and exit as well as privacy. If there is a need to step into a bathtub, it is vital that a grab handle is also installed on the outside of the bath. Remove or tighten any loosely fitting towel bars to avoid those being used unsafely as a grab bar. These safety bars must be properly installed. Contact your local Homewatch CareGivers to find a reputable durable medical equipment provider and installation company.

Problem: *The toilet is standard (low and no assistance in standing or sitting).*

Solution: This again depends on the level of assistance that your parent needs in the restroom. There should be grab bars on each side of the toilet. There should also be an elevated toilet seat installed to help with standing and sitting.

Problem: *The floor is slick tile or linoleum.*

Solution: Install a non-slip carpet or mat near the toilet, sink and bathtub. Make sure towels are low and easily accessible. Bring in a hamper where wet towels can be put.

Candy Parks says it's critical to have a temperature gauge in the bathtub. "Often the elderly have trouble with extremes of hot and cold. Make it easier by giving them a temperature gauge to easily avoid burns or chills."

KITCHEN

Kitchens are another location in the house in which risks are high. Your parent may be very comfortable in the kitchen, or they might struggle to make meals independently. Remember, dementia often leads people to forget about leaving food items out for prolonged periods of time, leaving appliances on after use, or operating tools in an unsafe manner. Make sure you discuss any rearrangement of food or kitchen equipment so that your parent can still be involved in the kitchen.

Make sure you solve the following hazards in the kitchen:

Problem: *Kitchen appliances are too high or too low to reach flat-footed; appliances are old or have become unsafe to operate without supervision.*

Solution: Find a senior-friendly handy-man who is trustworthy in your neighborhood. Make sure his number is available on a phone list for quick reference. Move the appliances to the counter or a waist-height cupboard as well, and make sure they are near an outlet.

If possible, have a discussion to remove these items altogether, especially if they are seldom used. If not, offer a safer alternative. Due to the increased risk of fires, consider having the stove disabled. Keep in mind that this means making meals available to them that are healthy but can be prepared in the microwave. Contact your local Homewatch CareGivers for contacts to local meal programs or food-delivery services.

Problem: *Food in the refrigerator is not fresh or is expired.*

Solution: Clean out the fridge but don't just replace the food with new supplies; have an honest conversation with your parent. Does he/she need help cooking? Would he prefer to receive meals on wheels? Does he need help grocery shopping and picking out nutritional meals? Make sure that you give him/her options and be open to suggestions. Make sure to apply dates to perishable items, including salad dressings, spices and canned foods. This will make it easier for your parent to prepare his or her own meals moving forward.

Problem: *Your parent can cook but does not have a steady hand.*

Solution: Your parent probably already notices a change in his/her dexterity and mobility. Offer to help as much as necessary and have an honest discussion as listed above. Being on hand during meal prep to help out (not to take over) maintains a safe level of independence.



Problem: *Based on what food is in the house, your parent is no longer eating nutritious meals.*

Solution: This requires another honest discussion. Remember that your parent may be changing their food habits because of an increased sense of not being capable of safely operating kitchen tools and appliances. Providing options and reassurance that you are working with them will eliminate a fear of their loss of independence. Why are they eating so much fast-food or delivery? Does he/she need help cooking? Would he/she prefer groceries delivered? Would he/she like to have help planning a meal schedule and menus? There are numerous options for help for your parent to maintain a healthy diet and nutrition program.

Nurse Dana Wimberly says, “A couple of things happen when a senior can’t reach things in their home. First, it’s easier for them to fall. Second, something may fall down on them. The most important, however, is that this lack of access may keep your senior loved one from eating healthy meals, or at all!”

Wimberly says to change things to their liking but make it accessible to them. “When putting things away ask him/her, ‘what do you think about putting this here instead of there so you can reach it better?’ Whatever you do, be honest and let them know that it’s all for their well-being.”

LAUNDRY FACILITIES

Laundry rooms are often inconveniently located and poorly ventilated. Your parent may struggle with doing his/her own laundry because of the physical task or because of the difficulty of accessing the room.

Make sure you solve the following hazards in the laundry facilities:

Problem: *The room is dimly lit and damp.*

Solution: Make sure there is proper ventilation. If not, restrict the use of the room until proper repairs have been made. Change the light-bulb to a higher wattage and make sure the light is easily accessible.

Problem: *There are old rugs and clothing on the floor.*

Solution: Remove anything that would cause a fall. If the floors tend to get wet, install rubber mats. Also make sure that there are no loose or low-hanging wires. Purchase an easy-to-access hamper and sorter to make it clear and keep the work space free of clutter.

Problem: *Your loved one has to go up and down stairs to use the laundry facilities or to perform activities of daily living.*

Solution: If possible, make it easier on him/her by changing the location of the laundry facility in their house to somewhere more accessible. Of course, this isn't always a possibility. In the cases where stairs are necessary, there should always be handrails on both sides of the stairs. Make sure that the handrails are tightly fixed to the wall, and do regular updates to make sure. The stairs should also be free of clutter and swept or vacuumed often.

Problem: *The appliances are old or in ill-repair.*

Solution: Get new machines and give your parents a tutorial. If this is not an option, make sure your parent has access to a senior-friendly repair man. You also have the option to arrange a send-out service. These services allow your parent to maintain their routine while having the option to not have to operate machinery and go down stairs carrying heaving loads.

OUTSIDE THE HOME

In the Yard and Garage

Most people find it a luxury to spend time in the garden or working in the garage. Now that your parent is spending more time at home, leisure time will be spent doing things he/she loves.

Make sure that the outdoor area is safe by following the below tips.

- Gardening tools should be available and easy to reach.
- Any yard chemicals should be clearly labeled and dated.
- Any tools should be easy to reach from a flat-footed stance.
- There should be a window or some sort of ventilation in the garage.
- Make sure that your parents have access to a snow shoveling service in the winter months, and yard maintenance in the summer.

Whether you live across the country or across town from your parent, these essential safety updates can be performed by a Homewatch CareGivers professional. We provide free in-home safety evaluations for anyone who is interested in our services.

With over 3 million hours of care performed by our staff, we are a trusted source of in-home elder care and safety around the world. Homewatch CareGivers promotes the respect and dignity of our clients. If your parent needs help getting dressed, bathing, or in personal moments in the bathroom, it is vital that you maintain their privacy. Our caregivers are trained as professionals who encourage independence while being able to assist when needed.

Homewatch CareGivers also offers Remote Care Monitoring. If your parent's house is generally safe, this technology can provide you with peace of mind when you are far away or at work. Our Remote Care Monitoring Systems offer a variety of options, including medication and safety alerts, emergency response and video monitoring. Now, wherever you are, you can have assistance in making sure your loved one is safe.

"I like to make a difference. If I can go to work and put a smile on somebody's face, then that's all that matters... I don't only give my clients care, I go to their home, have a heart to heart with them about how they are living and see their needs. I attend to what their needs are, in their house and in their lives. I help them with suggestions to make their lives better."

- Candy Parks, Homewatch CareGivers

If your parent is in need of professionals in their area, please call their local Homewatch CareGivers office. Not only do we give care, we are also a community resource.

Your local Homewatch CareGivers can lead you to a local list of preferred providers for:

- Repair services
- Mechanics
- Handy-man services
- Grocery delivery
- Meals on Wheels and other food programs
- Senior community centers
- Gardeners/yard workers
- Continued learning classes, including foreign language, cooking and computers
- Pathways to Memory™, Homewatch CareGivers' program for Alzheimer's and dementia
- Elder law attorneys
- Hairdresser services
- Geriatric care managers
- Remote Care Monitoring, Homewatch CareGivers' care technology
- Moving companies
- Durable Medical Equipment providers (including walkers, wheelchairs and scooters)
- Senior-Friendly security systems
- Laundry and dry cleaning delivery services
- Hospice services
- Ramp installation
- Veterans Outreach Program
- Orthotics providers

At Homewatch CareGivers, our high quality in-home care protects independent lifestyles and provides peace of mind for you and your family.



At Homewatch CareGivers we're not just caregivers, we're an extension of your family. We offer the comfort and security that allow our clients the freedom to remain in their own homes. Homewatch CareGivers offers a variety of services that complement your family member's need for independence and quality of life. From transportation assistance to comprehensive personal care, let our family care for yours.

www.HomewatchCareGivers.com

