

In all areas of the home, check all electrical and telephone cords; rugs, runners and mats; telephone areas; smoke detectors; electrical outlets and switches; light bulbs; space heaters; wood burning stoves; and your emergency exit plan.

Electrical Outlets and Switches

Are any outlets and switches unusually warm or hot to the touch?

Unusually warm or hot outlets or switches may indicate that an unsafe wiring condition exists.

YES NO If YES, where

- » Unplug cords from outlets and do not use the switches.
- » Have an electrician check the wiring as soon as possible.

Do all outlets and switches have cover plates so that no wiring is exposed?

Exposed wiring presents a shock hazard.

YES NO If NO, where

- » Add a cover plate.

Does any outlet have smudge marks around the socket where plugs are inserted?

Smudge marks are an indicator that an electrical short has occurred in a plug that was inserted, inside the socket itself, or in both places.

YES NO If YES, where

- » Unplug all cords from the outlet.
- » Either replace the outlet yourself or call a qualified electrician to replace it.
- » Find the plug that was involved in the short and repair or replace it, if necessary.

Are light bulbs the appropriate size and type for the lamp or fixture?

A bulb of too high wattage or the wrong type may lead to fire through overheating. Ceiling fixtures, recessed lights, and "hooded" lamps will trap heat.

YES NO If NO, where

- » Replace with a bulb of the correct type and wattage, if you do not know the correct wattage, use a bulb no larger than 60 watts.

Electrical and Phone Cords

Are lamp, extension, and telephone cords placed out of the flow of traffic?

Cords stretched across walkways may cause someone to trip.

YES NO If NO, where

- » Arrange furniture so that outlets are available for lamps and appliances without the use of extension cords.
- » If you must use an extension cord, place it on the floor against a wall where people cannot trip over it.
- » Move the phone so that telephone cords will not lie where people walk.

Are cords out from beneath furniture and rugs or carpeting?

Furniture resting on cords can damage them, creating fire and shock hazards.

Electric cords which run under carpeting may cause a fire.

YES NO If NO, where

- » Remove cords from under furniture or carpeting.
- » Replace damaged or frayed cords.

Are cords attached to the walls, baseboards, etc., with nails or staples?

Nails or staples can damage cords, presenting fire and shock hazards.

YES NO If YES, where

- » Remove nails, staples, etc.
- » Check wiring for damage.
- » Use tape to attach cords to walls or floors.

Are electrical cords in good condition, not frayed or cracked?

Damaged cords may cause a shock or fire.

YES NO If NO, where

- » Replace frayed or cracked cords

Do extension cords carry more than their proper load, as indicated by the ratings labeled on the cord and the appliance?

Overloaded extension cords may cause fires. Standard 18-gauge extension cords can carry 1250 watts.

YES NO If YES, where

- » If the rating on the cord is exceeded because of the power requirements of one or more appliances being used on the cord, change the cord to a higher rated one or unplug some appliances.

Rugs, Runners and Mats

Are all small rugs and runners slip-resistant?

Falls are the most common cause of fatal injury for older people.

YES NO If NO, where

- » Remove rugs and runners that tend to slide.
- » Apply double-faced adhesive carpet tape or rubber matting to the backs of rugs and runners.
- » Purchase rugs with slip-resistant backing.
- » Check rugs and mats periodically to see if backing needs to be replaced.
- » Place rubber matting under rugs (Rubber matting that can be cut to size is usually available at your local hardware store).
- » Purchase new rugs with slip-resistant backing.

Tip: Over time, adhesive on tape can wear away. Rugs with slip-resistant backing also become less effective as they are washed. Periodically check rugs and mats to see if new tape or backing is needed.

Shelves

Are shelves well-secured to the wall and not overburdened with items that have a potential of falling?

YES NO If NO, where

- » Check each shelf to see if it is well-secured to the wall; if it isn't, secure to the wall. Contact a professional if needed.
- » Check each shelf to see if it is overburdened with items that have a potential of falling; if it is, rearrange the items stored on the shelf, or store some of the items elsewhere.
- » If shelves are not in easy reach for your loved one, consider adding new lower ones that can be reached without using a step stool or chair.

Telephones/Emergencies

Do your loved ones have trouble hearing the telephone ring, or do they have trouble hearing a caller when using the telephone?

Hearing difficulties increase for most people as they get older.

YES NO

- » Turn up the ringer volume on the telephone, or go to a hardware store to get a separate ringer with an adjustable volume control.
- » Consider adding a light that flashes when someone is calling.
- » Purchase a telephone that includes an adjustable volume control so that a caller's voice can be heard more clearly.

Are emergency numbers posted on or near the telephone?

Emergency telephone numbers for the police, fire department, local poison control center, and your loved one's doctor, along with a neighbor's number, and numbers for close family members, should be highly visible and printed clearly in large letters.

YES NO

- Write the numbers in large print and tape them to each phone in the home, or place them near each phone where they can be seen easily.

Does your loved one live alone and are they frail or unstable when they walk?

Once again, falls are the most common cause of fatal injury for older people.

YES NO

- Subscribe to an emergency medical response system from a company such as Lifeline, Lifealert, etc. Your loved one will receive an emergency call button to wear as a necklace pendant, on their wrist, or clipped to their belt. If they fall and can't get up, they can press the call button; that will automatically activate an emergency call for help over their telephone. Call your local hospital to find out who they recommend for this service.
- If your loved one is on Medicare, call his or her doctor. Explain their condition and ask if physical therapy would be appropriate to strengthen their muscles and improve their ability to walk. If it is appropriate, Medicare will usually pay for it even if it is done in your loved one's home. But, be certain the therapy is done by an agency that is certified by Medicare; otherwise, your loved one will have to pay the bill out of their own pocket.

Doorbell

Can your loved one hear the doorbell?

Once again, hearing difficulties increase for most people as they get older.

YES NO

- Consider an alternative to a doorbell such as a flashing light indicating someone is at the door.

Smoke/Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Have smoke/carbon monoxide detectors been installed in their home?

At least one detector should be placed on every floor.

YES NO

- Read the instructions that come with the detector for advice on the best place to install it.
- Make sure detectors are placed near bedrooms, either on the ceiling or 6-12 inches below the ceiling on the wall.
- Install detectors away from air vents.

Are the detectors working properly?

Many home fire injuries and deaths are caused by smoke and toxic gases, rather than the fire itself. Carbon monoxide poisoning is caused by poorly operating furnaces and chimneys.

YES NO If NO, where

- » Check and replace batteries and bulbs according to the manufacturer’s instructions.
- » Periodically vacuum the grillwork of each detector.
- » Replace any detector that cannot be repaired.

Tip: Some fire departments or local governments will provide assistance in acquiring or installing these detectors.

Space Heaters

Are heaters that come with a 3-prong plug being used in a 3-hole outlet or with a properly attached adapter?

The grounding feature provided by a 3-hole receptacle or an adapter for a 2-hole receptacle is a safety feature designed to reduce the risk of shock.

YES NO If NO, where

- » Never defeat the grounding feature.
- » If you do not have a 3-hole outlet, use an adapter to connect the heater’s 3-prong plug. Make sure the adapter ground wire or tab is attached to the outlet.

Are small stoves and heaters placed where they cannot be knocked over, and away from furnishings and flammable materials, such as curtains or rugs?

Heaters can cause fires or serious burns if they cause you to trip or if they are knocked over.

YES NO If NO, where

- » Move heaters away from passageways and flammable materials such as curtains, rugs, furniture, etc.

If your home has space heating equipment, such as a kerosene heater, a gas heater or an LP gas heater, do you understand the installation and operating instructions thoroughly?

Unvented heaters should be used with room doors open or windows slightly open to provide ventilation. The correct fuel, as recommended by the manufacturer, should always be used. Vented heaters should have proper venting, and the venting system should be checked frequently. Improper venting is the most frequent cause of carbon monoxide poisoning, and older consumers are at special risk.

YES NO

- » Review the installation and operating instructions.
- » Call your local fire department if you have additional questions.

Woodburning Stoves

Is woodburning equipment installed properly?

Woodburning stoves should be installed by a qualified person according to local building codes.

YES NO

»» Local building code officials or fire marshals can provide requirements and recommendations for installation.

Note: Some insurance companies will not cover fire losses if wood stoves are not installed according to local codes.

Emergency Exit Plan

Does your loved one have an emergency exit plan and an alternate emergency exit plan in case of a fire?

Once a fire starts, it spreads rapidly. Since they may not have much time to get out and there may be a lot of confusion, it is important that they know what to do.

YES NO

»» Develop an emergency exit plan.

»» If more than one person lives in the house, choose a meeting place outside their home so they can be sure that everyone is capable of escape quickly and safely.

»» Practice the plan from time to time to make sure everyone is capable of escape quickly and safely.