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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.

NOVEMBER 2022

Caregiving in  
The Comfort of Home®

# Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”



## Fire Safety

Alzheimer's disease (AD) 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. 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. Seniors are also more vulnerable because:

- **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 seniors 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 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



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Article continues  
on page 2

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. Have a “safety zone” of at least 3 feet around the stove and areas where hot food or drink is prepared or carried.**

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

## Burns

People with AD can burn themselves because they don't realize the danger.

### The most common causes include:

- ➔ Scalding from steam, hot bath water, hot foods, or cooking liquids
- ➔ Contact with a flame, a stove, or a fireplace
- ➔ Electrical burns or sunburns

It's important to treat burns quickly so they don't get infected or form a scar. Take the person in your care to an emergency room right away if they:

- Have large or deep burns on their face, hands, feet, groin, or over a large joint
- Are coughing, having trouble breathing, or are short of breath
- Pass out, even if only for a few seconds
- Have shaking chills or a fever of 101 degrees or higher

### Types of Burns

**First-degree burn** affects just the top layer of skin.

**Second-degree burn** affects the top layer of skin and the tissue underneath it. The skin will form blisters that leak a clear fluid.

**Third-degree burn** is serious and deep. It affects all the skin layers. It damages nerves, so it may not cause pain.

**An inhalation burn** happens when someone breathes in very hot air, steam, smoke, or chemicals. Often, they're caused by liquid that's almost boiling or hot food. They're hard to see except for some signs on the face and around the mouth.

Source: Care and Prevention of Burn Injuries in People with Alzheimer's (webmd.com)

## Taking Care of Yourself— The Healing Power of Pets

Pets do not just make good friends for children, they also make great companions for seniors. Owning a pet has been shown to help reduce stress and loneliness among the elderly, as well as improve their blood pressure levels, physical activity levels, and social interaction. Pets also stimulate mental activity and reduce anxiety over the future. As well as benefiting from having a loving companion, a pet can reduce focus on the physical discomforts related to aging. A trained dog can help people with disabilities do some activities of daily living. For more information, visit [www.petpartners.org](http://www.petpartners.org).



**Note** — Special fire warning devices are available, such as smoke alarms with a vibrating pad or flashing light for the deaf and hard of hearing.

## Live Life Laughing!

There are more than 1,000 bones in the human body.

Shhh, doctor! There are three dogs outside in the waiting room!



## Inspiration

Your eyes see what they are trained to see.

### Memory Care - Scalding

Let hot food and drinks cool down before serving them. Older people are more likely to be scalded by hot water because their skin is thinner and less sensitive.