

# Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU...CARING FOR OTHERS”

## Fire Safety

### October Is Fire Safety Month

The elderly are at greater risk of dying in a fire. 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. Caregivers can prevent tragedies by *reducing the chance* of the person in their care being killed or injured by 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** 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.

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**Never cook while wearing robes or other loose fitting garments that can contact hot surfaces.**

- 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

## The Home Escape Plan

People with disabilities should be more cautious because of physical limitations and a decreased ability to react in a fire emergency. People with disabilities may need the help of a caregiver to practice proper fire safety precautions.

Special fire warning devices are available, such as smoke alarms with a vibrating pad or flashing light for the deaf and hard of hearing. In case of fire, plan the escape around the person's capabilities.



- ✓ **Keep three essential items by your bedside:** Your eyeglasses, whistle and a telephone. 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 telephone 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:** Have primary and back-up routes mapped out for each room. Practice getting out. If you have practiced escape routes, your memory and instinct will help you move in the right direction and in the right way.
- ✓ **Check windows from which escape is planned:** Can you open the window or is it painted or nailed shut? Make sure your exits *allow* you to exit!
- ✓ **If you use a wheelchair or walker:** Map out escape routes that are wide enough for you to get through.
- ✓ **Discuss your escape plans** with your family, the building manager or neighbors. Everybody should know where to meet outside the building and what routes everyone is taking.
- ✓ **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.

## Taking Care of Yourself—How to Let Go of Anger

“Anger is like a storm rising up from the bottom of your consciousness. When you feel it coming, turn your focus to your breath. Breathe in deeply to bring your mind home to your body. Then look at the person triggering this emotion: With mindfulness, you can see that she is unhappy, that she is suffering. You’ll feel motivated by a desire to say or do something nice—to help the other person suffer less. This means compassionate energy has been born in your heart. When compassion appears, anger is deleted.

Source: “From the book *Anger: Wisdom for Cooling the Flames*,” by Buddhist monk *Thich Nhat Hanh* (New York: Riverside Books, 2002).



## Alzheimer’s Fire Safety

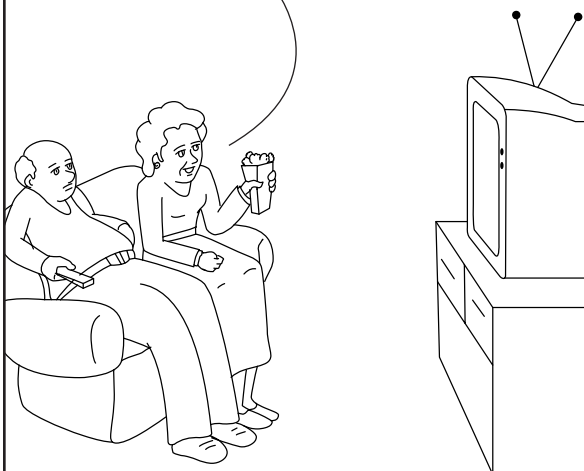
If a person with dementia or Alzheimer’s disease lives in the house, take additional fire safety precautions: Be sure to keep matches and cigarettes out of reach. Install a gas stove shut-off valve or a circuit breaker for an electric stove so the stove cannot be turned on without proper supervision.

## Get Your Annual Flu Shot

It’s not just influenza that can kill, but the complications (usually pneumonia) that follow a bad infection. If you’re over 65, getting an annual flu vaccine greatly reduces your chances of falling ill to the flu or its dangerous complications.

## Live Life Laughing!

The evening news is where they begin by saying, “Good Evening,” and then proceed to tell you why it isn’t.



## Inspiration

You can only go as fast as the slowest part of you can go.

~ Bonnie Raitt, Singer

## Don’t Fall—Be Safe

Remove dangerous items such as loose scatter rugs and ensure that staircases and hallways are free of clutter.

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## **SAFETY TIPS**

### **Your Best Defense: Smoke Detectors**

Smoke detectors can double the chance of surviving a fire by providing early warning and time for escape. Don't live without them! For the best protection, install both ionization and photoelectric smoke alarms (some models provide dual coverage). **Smoke detectors should be installed on every level of your home or apartment building.**

- If you cannot install a detector yourself, ask for help. Many local fire companies will install free detectors for you.
- At a minimum, have a detector immediately outside your sleeping area, either on the ceiling or high on the wall.
- Never disable detectors by removing batteries or disconnecting wires. If the detector goes off from cooking fumes or bathroom steam, it may be in a poor location and need to be moved.
- Clean detectors periodically to keep them free from dust and dirt and test the batteries.
- Detector batteries should be changed at least twice a year.

NEXT ISSUE... DIABETES—AVOIDING COMPLICATIONS

# Caregiver Assistance News

“ C A R I N G F O R Y O U . . . C A R I N G F O R O T H E R S ”

## Q U I C K Q U I Z

People over the age of 80 die in fires at a rate three times higher than the rest of the population. Caregivers can help prevent these tragedies by taking steps to reduce the chance of the person in their care being killed or injured by a fire. Answer True or False to the questions below.

1. Medication side effects, such as drowsiness, can contribute to the danger of fire for seniors.  
T F
2. Unsafe smoking habits are the leading cause of fire deaths among seniors.  
T F
3. Toxic fumes from smoke can kill.  
T F
4. For the elderly, the kitchen can be a dangerous place. Cooking is the third leading cause of fire deaths.  
T F
5. Electric space heaters are helpful and safe in the bathroom or other wet areas.  
T F
6. Smoking near an oxygen tank is safe if people are careful.  
T F
7. Practice a home escape plan with primary and back-up routes mapped out for each room.  
T F
8. Most kitchen fires occur when cooking food is left unattended.  
T F
9. *Discuss your escape plans* with your family and caregivers because everybody should know where to meet outside the building and what routes everyone is taking.  
T F
10. For safety, eyeglasses, whistle and a telephone are essential to keep by the bedside.  
T F

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_