



Spectrum of Safety Through the Ages

As the saying goes, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” In other words, precautionary measures can help people avoid potentially harmful and life-changing situations. September is both Baby Safety and Fall Prevention month; in recognition of these causes, we explore the spectrum of safety through the ages and offer a number of safety tips and reminders, from newborns to the elderly.

While many precautionary measures are instinctive and easily accessible for parents of infants and young children, addressing various aspects of safety are not as common as we age. For example, parents of young children often think to turn down the temperature of the hot water heater; however, older people may overlook such a simple safety measure.

These days, stores are filled with mom-inspired products to help parents address potential safety hazards, from outlet plugs and gates to furniture corner cushions and door knobs covers; however, safety measures for older adults can be less obvious, such as removing trip hazards, including cords and rugs, and installing ramps and grab bars in the bathroom.

“At Home Helpers, we regularly assess our clients’ homes and lifestyles for areas of improvement,” said Mary Doepke, RN, Owner of Home Helpers of Hinsdale. “A fresh set of eyes may identify potential concerns that the family does not see due to their level of familiarity. It’s always wise to reevaluate safety needs over time as new issues and challenges are constantly emerging both inside and outside the home.”

Doepke offers a number of precautionary suggestions and recommendations for both young and old:

Dugs – Keep medications in a safe place, and use them only as directed. Maintain a list of medications, their purposes, prescribing doctor(s) and dosage/directions. Keep it handy should you need medical assistance or wonder how a newly prescribed medication might interact with a current medication. Also, keep household cleaners and other potentially poisonous substances in a safe place.

Adapt – Make changes within your home to eliminate possible hazards. From baby-proofing for young children to adding hand rails and eliminating trip and fire hazards commonly associated with extension cords, there are a variety of safety checklists for people of all ages.

Ways that safety changes through the ages:

- With infants and toddlers the focus is on “baby-proofing” the environment.
- For kids the focus shifts to “stranger danger,” knowing your address, how to dial 911 and bicycle safety.
- For late teens and into the 20s driving safety and use of alcohol in moderation are often primary concerns.
- In our 30s, 40s and 50s physical fitness takes center stage for reasons including appearance, weight control and overall health.
- Then, once we reach our 60s, the environment, fall hazards, driving and physical strength are all important aspects of safety.

Negotiate – Whether walking or driving, look to see what’s ahead and negotiate your surroundings to enhance safety. Be careful when walking on uneven or slippery surfaces, going up or down stairs and in areas that are not well lit. Also, know your limitations and avoid driving when the conditions are unfavorable. For example, the glare from headlights at night in rainy conditions can be challenging for people of all ages. Likewise, older people may wish to set their own limitations, such as avoiding driving during rush hour or turning left at a busy intersection.

Gauge – People tend to know themselves and their limitations best, whether due to illness (e.g., arthritis, stroke), injury (e.g., broken bone, use of assistive device such as crutches or cane) and/or natural age-related challenges (e.g., vision changes). Don’t try to overdo it. Better safe than sorry. You may also consider investing in a [Direct Link](#) personal emergency response system, medication dispenser or vital signs monitoring unit to help make life easier.

Did you know?

According to the American Geriatrics Society, one-third of all people older than 65 will fall each year. In addition, the fear of falling and fall-related injuries can regularly lead to radical lifestyle changes, which may drastically reduce mobility, increase the risk of depression, and increase the need for care and assistance.

Emergency – Keep emergency contact information easily accessible and make sure everyone knows where to find it. Have an emergency exit plan and designated meeting location in place and practice it regularly. Make sure children know their full name, address, phone number, and how and when to dial 911. Use the ICE program to program emergency phone numbers into your cell phone so people can easily find a loved one’s contact information in case of an emergency.

Review – In the spring and fall when we change the clocks you should always change your smoke alarm and carbon monoxide detector batteries as well as ensuring they are in good working condition. We also recommend changing the batteries in garage door pads, especially for those of you with children who may use them when they get home from school. Also, take a moment to review your safety risks and changes that might merit attention especially around the home.

Home Helpers Home Safety Information

To help you identify specific risks in your home, review the following 10 statements. In situations in which you and/or your family have concerns, consider the suggestions we offer to help you address your needs. In addition to the suggestions below, review the educational sheet entitled: **Home Safety Checklist**. The checklist includes general tips for all the spaces and places in your home.

In the event of an accident that requires time in the hospital, prior to being discharged, your social worker can help you prepare for your transition by:

- Advising what assistance or supervision you may now need.
- Sharing information about community-based agencies and providers of medical equipment and supplies.
- Helping you determine what modifications to your lifestyle you might want to make.
- Ordering supplies and assistive devices on your behalf.
- Providing contact information for area businesses that might be helpful.
- Advising you whether or not your insurance covers purchases and/or modifications.

If you have concerns about...	You might...
1. Getting to and through the ENTRY DOOR of your home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Secure handrails along the steps by the entry doors. ▪ Install a ramp over the steps. ▪ Use a different entrance.
2. Getting to and from your BEDROOM.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Move the bed to the area where you spend most of your time. ▪ Convert another room into a bedroom.
3. Getting to and from a BATHROOM.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Purchase a bedside commode. ▪ Rely on a bedpan or adult diapers ▪ Add a bathroom.
4. Getting up and down STEPS (<i>if necessary</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Install handrails on both sides of the stairs. ▪ Move your belongings and personal items to the first floor of your home. ▪ Contract to have a stair lift installed. ▪ Move to a single-story home or ground-level apartment.
5. FALLING and moving about your home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Remove or secure area rugs. ▪ Use assistive devices (e.g. walker, wheelchair). ▪ Eliminate clutter. ▪ Use/install railings along the sides of your bed. ▪ Raise or lower furniture. ▪ Lower or cover the thresholds in the doorways. ▪ Rearrange furniture.
6. TRANSFERRING to and from your bed, a chair or sofa.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learn transfer techniques. ▪ Make arrangements for a hospital bed to help you sit up and that you can raise and lower. ▪ Purchase a lift chair. ▪ Use cushions or place a board under cushions to help you get up.
7. TRANSFERRING to and from a toilet, tub or shower.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learn transfer techniques. ▪ Purchase a raised toilet seat and/or a seat for your tub or shower. ▪ Install grab bars by your toilet, tub or shower.
8. BATHING.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use non-slip mats or strips. ▪ Install a handheld showerhead. ▪ Make sure your bathroom floors are dry. ▪ Convert a tub to a shower ▪ Install pump top shampoo, conditioner, soap dispensers.
9. REACHING things you regularly need or use (e.g. clothes, personal hygiene products, food)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rearrange personal items to make them more accessible. ▪ Move things to a lower shelf. ▪ Use a basket or bag to collect needed items. ▪ Purchase a grabber.
10. PREPARING MEALS.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sit when cooking. ▪ Make easy meals. ▪ Use pots and pans you can manage. ▪ Rearrange your cabinets and refrigerator for easier access. ▪ Purchase a stove with the controls on the front. ▪ Purchase a side-by-side refrigerator.

Home Helpers Safety Checklist

Taking steps to identify and address safety risks in and around your home can help reduce your chance of injury. We have put together a few tips to help keep you safe in your home.

Being able to safely **FUNCTION** in your home is important.

- Keep hallways, paths, walkways, steps and other areas are free of clutter.
- Ensure all handrails are secure.
- The furniture in the main pathways should be sturdy in case you need to grab something to catch your balance.
- Make sure you can get over thresholds between rooms.
- Keep outlets and controls on appliances (e.g. stove) at a distance well within your reach.
- The doors and windows can easily be locked and unlocked.

Having enough **LIGHTING** in and around your home is important.

- Make sure you can easily turn lighting on/off in your bedroom, sitting areas, bathroom and kitchen.
- There should be lighting by steps that enables you to see the outline of each step.
- The same goes for light in your halls and pathways, you should be able to see things that might be in your way.
- Install timers to keep the lights in and outside of your home on a schedule. Not only will this make it easier for you around the house, but can keep burglars away if you're not at home.
- All lamp cords are safely out of the way.
- Ensure you are using the proper wattage light bulbs.

Being able to **CALL FOR HELP** is important.

- Make sure you have access to a phone by your bed, in your sitting area, bathroom and kitchen.
- Your phones should be easy to reach and work properly.
- A personal emergency response system (e.g. "I've fallen and can't get up") might be appropriate if you are alone several hours a day and need to reach help in an emergency.
- If you use a cordless phone or cell phone ensure that the battery is regularly charged.
- Keep a list of emergency and important contact numbers handy and program the numbers in your phone if possible.
- Purchase a baby monitor if you might need to reach someone else in your home.

Reducing the chance of **TRIPPING** and **SLIPPING** is important.

- Be careful on wood and tile floors that could easily be slippery.
- Remove or tape down the edges of throw rugs or decorative carpets.
- Ensure carpeting is stretched properly so there are no ripples.
- Keep an eye on your pets as they can be a possible tripping hazard.

Having working **SMOKE DETECTORS** and a **CARBON MONOXIDE** detector is important.

- Test the detectors every few months to make sure they are working.
- Replace your batteries in the spring and fall. A good way to remember this is to change the batteries when you turn your clocks forward or backward for daylight savings time.

Knowing the **TIME** and keeping on a schedule can be an important part of your recovery.

- The numbers on your clock and/or watch should be large enough to see.
- Make sure you can see the time regardless of where you are in your home.
- Purchase an automated medication dispenser if you need assistance remembering when to take your medications.
- Check your calendar daily so you know when to do therapy or other treatment.

OTHER safety considerations include the following:

- Keep a first aid kit in your home and make sure it is accessible.
- Have a working fire extinguisher handy.
- Check electrical cords for wear and tear.
- Replace or repair cords that appear damaged.
- Do NOT overload extension cords.
- Remove wheels (also known as casters) from your bed, chairs, and other furniture.
- Add a ramp, lift or handrails by steps.
- Adjust the height of your bed as appropriate.
- Install grab bars in the bathroom and other areas as appropriate.
- Take time to adjust and make sure you have your balance after standing up.
- Keep your outside walkways and entrances free from debris, leaves, water, and snow.

HOME HELPERS – *Making Life Easier* Home Helpers offers quality non-medical and personal care* and companionship services similar to the care and support often provided by family members. Our flexible care plans are tailored to fit our clients' specific needs and budgets. Compassionate Care is a bi-monthly newsletter produced by Home Helpers. We hope you found this edition to be informative and helpful.

Home Helpers • 123 E. Ogden Ave. Suite 102A • Hinsdale, IL 60521
(630) 323-7231 • www.MaryAndMikeCare.com

*Personal care provided as permitted by state law. Each office is independently owned and operated. Services may vary at each individual office location. Check with your local Home Helpers office for available services. Home Helpers does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of religion, race, sex, color, national origin, ethnicity, disability, age or sexual preference in connection with employment or acceptance, treatment, or participation in its programs, services and activities.