

Fire and Burn Safety for Older Adults

Smoke Detectors

- Install smoke alarms inside and outside of each bedroom and sleeping area and on every level of the home including the basement.
- Test all smoke alarms at least once a month. Press the test button to be sure the alarm is working.
- People who are hard-of-hearing or deaf can use special alarms that have strobe lights and bed shakers.
- Change smoke alarm batteries every 6 months and replace the entire device every 10 years.

Electrical Safety

- Do not have cords and wires hanging where they can be easily stepped on or tripped over.
- Do not overload your electric outlets.
- Never run electric cords near heat sources, through doorways, under rugs or carpets, or where they can be stepped on.
- Always make sure electric cords are not frayed or damaged. Never allow cords to become knotted, as this can damage the wire and insulation.

Cooking Safety

- Never leave cooking food unattended. Grease fires start up fast when oils or fats overheat.
- Always remove pots and pans from the burner if you're called away from the kitchen.
- Place a rubber mat in front of your stove to prevent slipping and falling.
- When removing lids from hot foods, remember that steam may have accumulated. Lift the cover or lid away from your face and arm.
- Consider the weight of pots and pans. Attempt to move only those items that you can easily handle.
- Avoid wearing long or loose clothing while cooking; it can easily catch on fire.
- Be sure to turn pot handles away from the front of the stove.
- Do not cook if you are sleepy, impaired from alcohol, or have taken medicine that makes you drowsy.

Candle Safety

- Extinguish all candles when leaving the room or going to bed.
- Keep candles away from all flammable items such as blankets and curtains.
- During power outages, avoid carrying a candle. Instead use a flash light.



Heating Safety

- Keep space heaters at least three feet away from drapes, upholstery, walls, or anything that might catch fire.
- When using a heating pad, choose a product with a built-in sensor and automatic shut-off feature.
- Check electric blankets for cracks or breaks in wiring, plugs, and connectors.
- Do not place anything on top of an electric blanket when it is in use.
- Be sure to turn off all heating devices when not in use or when you leave the room.

Smoking Safety

- Avoid smoking when drowsy.
- Never smoke in a home where oxygen is being used.
- Alcohol and smoking can be a dangerous combination, especially if the smoker is on medication as well.

Safety Precautions in the Bathroom

- Always check the water temperature before entering a bath/shower or putting someone in a bath/shower.
- To prevent slipping and falling, grab bars, no-skid mats, and shower seats should be installed in the tub or shower.

Adults Living Independently

Many older adults are living independently or living with a caregiver who is also an older adult. Risks from burns and scalds can pose a threat to their independence and quality of life. Most burn injuries among older adults occur at home while the person is cooking or bathing. Keeping a safe home environment can promote independence, dignity and safety.

Operation EDITH – Exit Drills In The Home

Draw a floor plan of your home and identify at least two exits out of every room – one primary and one alternate. Make sure that each of these exits functions properly with a clear path leading to each exit. This is important not only for your escape but also for rescue personnel to provide assistance.

Stop, Drop and Roll

STOP – Don't run; this will only fan the flames causing them to grow.

DROP – Drop down to the ground.

ROLL – Roll over and over, covering your face with your hands. This will smother the flames.

Some elderly people are unable to STOP, DROP and ROLL due to physical conditions such as arthritis or osteoporosis. In cases like these, the only alternative is to smother the flames with a nearby blanket, coat, or rug.

Resources

- For an emergency, contact 911.
- Contact the West Penn Burn Center at 412.578.5273 for urgent burn care information.
- To schedule an outpatient burn care appointment, please call 412.578.5120.
- Additional information can be found at www.westpennburncenter.com.