

Home Safety: Are You At Risk For Injury?



Introduction

A safe home supports abilities, is easy to use and feels comfortable. A home that does not meet these criteria is an unsafe home. An unsafe home increases the likelihood or probability of accidents occurring!

Accidents can lead to injury, disability and premature death. In the United States, accidents are the fifth leading cause of death. (According to the CDC preliminary data, there were 97,707 accidental deaths in 2001.)

WHAT IS HOME SAFETY?

Home safety is freedom from accidental injury. Most accidents occur at home, and are due to falls, fires, and poisonings.

WHAT CAUSES ACCIDENTS?

Accidents are caused by combinations of personal and/or environmental risk factors*. The more risk factors you have, the greater the likelihood of harm, illness or injury. Home accidents are caused by personal and environmental risk factors.

Personal Factors include: life and health influences such as muscle strength, balance, vision, range of motion, endurance, posture lifestyle choices, personal actions, abilities, medications, fitness, etc.

Environmental Factors include: home hazards and barriers** such as scatter rugs, poor lighting, electrical hazards, lack of safety bars, inaccessibility, etc.

ACCIDENTS ARE PREVENTABLE!

Taking action to reduce home safety risks, does prevent accidents. The first step to reduce your risk of home injuries is to identify your personal and environmental risk factors, because safety at home depends on personal abilities and suitability of the house.

IDENTIFYING RISKS

You have to know what your risks are in order to fix them. So the first step to improve home safety is to find your risks!

FIND IT!

Use whatever tools you can to help you to carefully analyze personal and environmental factors that influence your health and home safety.

I. Do a personal assessment:

- A. Consider important health and life factors including
 1. strength, range of motion, endurance
 2. sensation
 3. medical conditions
 4. abilities and capabilities
 5. needs of others living in your home
 6. personal goals, desires, expectations
 7. pain levels
- B. Determine what is causing you difficulty
- C. Determine what is most important to you
- D. Consider emergency planning actions you would take

II. Do a home assessment

- A. Carefully observe and assess
 1. your home design, structure, furniture and surroundings.
 2. every interior room, including features, equipment, appliances
 3. the immediate exterior of your home or apartment
 4. your neighborhood
- B. Find, face or fix it
 1. look for barriers
 2. look for obstacles or hazards
 3. look for unsafe actions
 4. think about your priorities
 5. fix it

FACE IT!

Once you have carefully analyzed all factors that have an influence on your health and abilities, face the challenge.

Determine what factors are:

1. preventing you from accomplishing a meaningful task
2. causing you discomfort
3. forcing you to work harder at getting a job done.

Once you have made these determinations, look at how you can make your life easier, more comfortable and safer. Consider the possibilities, determine your priorities, and then take action to eliminate or reduce your risks. In other words, FIX IT!

FIX IT!

If you have identified risk factors, you have found factors that could lead to your injury, disability or premature death. Fix it fast! Research indicates that as much as 1/3rd of all accidents could have been prevented with simple alterations to the home. Often, simple home changes will increase safety, comfort and independence.

To FIX, look at your home with a critical eye. Consider the following solution choices.

1. Fix by rearranging! This often costs nothing.
2. Fix by repairing
3. Fix by redesigning
4. Fix by eliminating

Once you have determined how you are going to fix it, figure out what you will fix first. Decide if you want to fix the easiest items first, the least costly items, the most important, the most costly, the one that will give you the greatest comfort, or will make your life easier, etc.

FIT IT!

Whatever you choose to fix, make sure the fix FITS you! Equipment should fit your body type and size and abilities. Design should be comfortable for your body weight, height and strength and abilities. Make choices that will help you to be more comfortable, or will enable you to get a task done safely with little to no effort.

HOME SAFETY TIPS

Your home is unique, because you are unique. There are no cookie cutter solutions for every single home, but there are some universal tips that you can consider.

1. Security

- a. Make sure your windows and doors are secure
- b. Make sure you have good outdoor lighting

2. Fire Safety

- a. Have an electrician check your electrical wiring at least every 5 years, if your house is over 20 years old
- b. Never overload electrical circuits , or have exposed wires
- c. Install smoke detectors near and inside bedrooms, and on every floor. (Tip: On the ceiling, or 6-8" below the ceiling on side walls)
- d. Check and replace smoke detector batteries at least once a year (Tip: Do on your birthday or pick a holiday)
- e. Never smoke in bed!

3. Accident Prevention Measures

- a. Repairing stairways and floors
- b. Eliminate scatter rugs
- c. Have good home lighting
- d. Install grab bars
- e. Organize to keep reach between shoulders and knees
- f. Keep heaviest items within between chest and knee height
- g. Avoid twisting and bending
- h. When lifting, keep nose with the toes

4. Emergency Planning Measures

- a. Devise plans for different emergencies
- b. Have emergency supplies ready
- c. Have an emergency contact person

5. General Safety

- a. Keep medications stored in safe place
- b. Wear supportive shoes with heels less than 2"
- c. Avoid rushing
- d. Have emergency numbers visible and easy to see
- e. Keep phone within easy reach
- f. Wipe up spills immediately

SUMMARY

To reduce safety risks at home:

Face It!

- Look at your personal abilities and capabilities.
- Assess your home and surroundings.

Find It!

- Figure out what are barriers that prevent or reduce your ability.
- Determine hazards that threaten your safety.

Fix It!

- Eliminate barriers and hazards.

Fit It!

- To fix it, make sure your fixes fit you! Consider all your personal, life and health factors, before choosing solutions.

WANT HELP? Ask for the SAFESM

If you want an easy to use, inexpensive and confidential risk screening tool that is organized to help you to identify, score, and highlight potential health and safety risks in your life, call **SAFE AGING at 727-942-6100** or toll free at **866-SAFE AGE**, and ask for the SAFESM (Safety Appraisal For Elders risk screening tool) or go to our web site at **www.safeaging.com** for more information.

- ***Risk factors:** Conditions that increase the likelihood probability of harm.
- ****Barriers:** A feature that reduces capabilities or places a person at risk of injury. Any barrier could become a serious threat to home safety or independence.