

FIRE SAFETY

AGING AND FIRE

- The reduced sense of touch that comes with aging limits the ability to determine the temperature of surfaces or items such as pot handles or running water.
- Diminished or uncorrected sight impairs the ability to see fire hazards such as lit candles, burning cigarettes, and the beginning stages of a fire, when it could be extinguished more easily.
- Poor sight may limit the ability to see an exit in a fire situation.
- Loss of hearing reduces the ability to hear and respond to a smoke or carbon monoxide alarm.
- Impaired mobility and loss of balance when hurrying impairs the ability to flee.
- Memory impairments are associated with lack of judgement and increase the risk of unintentionally engaging in fire-risky behaviors.
- Short-term memory loss may increase the risk of leaving a stove burner or oven on.
- Indicators of risk for fire include difficulty with kitchen tasks, such as preparing food for cooking and difficulty with following multi-step directions.
- Symptoms of depression, which include fatigue and apathy, increase the risk of fire from unattended stove or cigarettes.
- Prescription drugs and alcohol both cause drowsiness and increase fire risk.
- Thinning skin, fragile blood vessels, reduced skin elasticity, and dehydration make burns more difficult to heal if they occur.

STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY

- Install and maintain smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. If necessary, change batteries yearly on a birthdate, Daylight Saving Time, or any other date that is easy to remember.
- Test smoke detector monthly by pressing the button on the smoke alarm unit.

- Consider a smoke detector with a strobe light. Additional information is on the website www.nfpa.org
- Write the installation date on the inside cover of the smoke detector and replace it every 10 years.
- Mount a fire extinguisher in the kitchen and elsewhere if needed (e.g., fireplace, areas where smoking is permitted). Check the pressure gauge monthly.
- Install plastic safety covers for the knobs on the oven and stove.
- Consider an auto shut-off for oven and/or stove.
- Have the gas company verify there is an automatic shut-off for natural gas if the pilot light goes out.
- Be attentive to turning off the stove before removing food from a pan on a cooking surface or in the oven.
- Set water heater to 120°F to prevent scalding.
- Color code water handles: red for hot, blue for cold.
- Place a sign on the oven, coffee maker, toaster, crock pot, iron, and other hot appliances that say “DO NOT TOUCH” or “STOP! VERY HOT.”
- Do not allow unsupervised use of appliances if the aged person demonstrates any of the risk factors described above.
- Unplug appliances when not in use and store out of sight when possible. Plug them into a surge protector kept in the “off” position if storage is not possible.
- Although microwaves present a smaller hazard than a stove, supervision may still be needed.
- Candles should not be used unless they are battery-operated. They can easily be knocked over or left burning when the person goes to bed, increasing fire risk.
- Give space heaters space.
- Develop a fire escape plan for the home, including who will be responsible for helping the aged person get to safety.
- Let a neighbor know that someone in the home needs additional assistance should a fire occur.
- Stop smoking.



- If smoking cessation is not an option:
 - Keep matches and lighter separate from the tobacco product and allow the aged person to smoke only when in the presence of others.
 - Purchase a large, deep ashtray and keep water in the bottom of it.
 - Place a cookie sheet under the ashtray to prevent ashes from falling on furniture or fabric surfaces.
 - Don't let the aged person smoke in bed.