
Safety in the Home

What do I need to know about home safety?

One of the top priorities of caregivers is keeping your loved one safe. People diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease face many challenges wherever they live. As a caregiver, you face the challenge of making the environment inside and outside safe for your loved one. To complicate matters, the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease vary from person to person. As the disease progresses, your loved one will have increasing difficulty remembering, thinking, processing and reasoning. These changing symptoms of Alzheimer's disease require families to adjust the living situation to meet current needs and abilities.

The books and videos/DVDs listed in this safety packet can be located in the library at the St. Louis chapter office, some for loan and some for sale. To request a book or visit the library, call (314) 432-3422. You can also access the complete list of books and videos/DVDs in our [award-winning library](#) by visiting the website.

Internet Resources for home safety issues

- [Alzheimer's Association Safety Center](#)—contains tips on home safety, wandering, driving, disaster preparedness, Medic Alert + Safe Return and Comfort Zone. Also, we have many tip sheets and brochures to help with safety concerns (see [Safety Topics](#)).
- [Ageless Design](#)—discusses educational topics that are dementia specific.
- [Consumer Products Safety Commission \(CPSC\)](#)—"Older Consumers Safety Checklist" provides a booklet with tips on home safety in a checklist format. It is not dementia-specific, but it contains critical information for people of all ages. Call 1-800-638-8270 or print from the internet.
- [Home Safety Council](#)—Resources for dealing with safety in the home. Includes safety checklists that can be customized. The checklist is not dementia-specific.
- [National Institute on Aging](#)—"Home Safety for People with Alzheimer's Disease" guide that provides a room-by-room tips for safety and includes additional information on Alzheimer's Disease. Call 1-800-438-4380 or print from the internet.
- [Alzheimer's in your Home](#)—Checklist to prepare the home safety for someone with Alzheimer's. This list reviews each room separately.
- [The Alzheimer's Store](#)—Catalog of useful products that deal with Alzheimer's. There are many safety products included.
- [USA.gov](#)—Consumer Protection for Seniors

Books related to safety

- The 36-Hour Day: A Family Guide to Caring for Persons with Alzheimer Disease, Related Dementing Illnesses , and Memory Loss in Later Life. Nancy L. Mace and Peter V Rabins. 1999.
- The Complete Guide to Alzheimer’s Proofing Your Home. Mark L. Warner. 1998.
- Contemporary Environments for People with Dementia. Uriel Cohen and Kristien Day. 1993.

Video (VHS) and DVD titles related to safety

- Home Care for Persons with Alzheimer’s Disease. 30 min. 1995. (VHS)
- Understanding Alzheimer's and Alzheimer's Safety. 50 min. (May be purchased at www.alz.org).

What are some top safety concerns?

(Note: The following safety issues are listed in alphabetical order, not by priority of need)

Burn and Fire Safety

Your loved one may experience a loss or decreased sense of touch. They may not be able to feel heat, cold, and even discomfort. They have a decreased ability to remember what to do in case of a fire.

Internet Resources for Fire Safety

- [U.S. Fire Administration](#)—this section of the website is dedicated to “Fire Safety for Older Adults” and provides many documents that deal with older adults and fire safety.
- [The Hartford](#)—Provides a booklet titled “**Fire Sense: A Smart Way to Prevent, Detect and Escape Home Fires**”, which can help families prevent, detect and escape home fires.

Products relating to fire safety and the stove

- **Cookstop-Stovetop Fire Prevention** (408) 929-8808: Programmable device used to prevent cooking fires. Motion sensor also installed for prevention.
- **HomeSense Enterprises LLC** (877) 785-9901: Programmable timer which turns the stove off unless the sensor detects someone in front of the stove.
- **Stove Guard International LTD.** (306) 931-2201: Monitors unattended cooking and will shut off the stove automatically. Includes a programmable timer.

Difficult Behaviors affecting Safety

These behaviors can include agitation, combativeness, rummaging, hiding, hoarding, hallucinations, illusions, and delusions. Individuals with Alzheimer’s disease may experience these behaviors in different ways or they may not experience them at all. These behaviors pose safety concerns for the person with AD and for caregivers. Often, “catastrophic” behaviors may be prevented by creating a safe and secure environment.

[Alzheimer’s Association](#)—call the 24-hour Helpline at 1-800-272-3900 or reference the section on Care Topics.

Books & Videos dealing with difficult behaviors and safety

- Care That Works: A Relationship Approach to Persons with Dementia. Jitka M. Zgola. 1999.
- Understanding Difficult Behaviors. Anne Robinson, Beth Spencer, Laurie White. 1989-2007.
- Alzheimer's Disease—Pieces of the Puzzle. 23 min. 1990.
- Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders. 3 hours. (no date available).

Driving

Many individuals in the early stages of memory loss can and do drive. However, as Alzheimer's disease and memory loss progresses, the person loses the ability to drive a vehicle safely. Most of the recent research encourages for the development of a proactive plan to gradually retire a person's driving (dependent on their current abilities).

Impaired individuals create an unsafe environment on the road for themselves and other drivers. The Alzheimer's Association Helpline (1-800-272-3900) is available 24 hours a day to help you with information about driving and safety and how to handle this sensitive topic. Please ask for our "Driving and Dementia" packet which includes tip sheets and forms that are used to report potentially unsafe drivers.

Internet Resources for Driving Safety

- [Alzheimer's Association](#)—contains links to many resources that pertain to driving and dementia including a brochure and fact sheet.
- [Caregiver Support Online](#)—document that deals with driving and "progressive dementia"
- [The Hartford](#)—Provides 3 booklets on driving and older adults, "Your Road Ahead: A Guide to Comprehensive Driving Evaluations", "At the Crossroads: Family Conversations about Alzheimer's Disease, Dementia & Driving" and "We Need to Talk: Family Conversations with Older Drivers".

Video dealing with driving safety

- Driving and Dementia Don't Mix. 30 min. 1995 (VHS)

Falls and Slips

Falls are the number one unintentional safety concern in the elderly population as a whole. Falls are even more of a concern for people with Alzheimer's disease or memory impairment because of decreased spatial perception. Items like throw rugs and electrical cords can cause the person to fall. Keep the living environment clutter free.

- For a list of providers offering safety products, please contact our office and ask for safety services resource list.
- **Department of Health and Human Services [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)**—brochure that offers a checklist to prevent falls. The checklist covers every room of the house.
- [Show Me Falls Free St. Louis](#)—booklet with a great overall view of slips and falls with statistics and keys to prevention.

Video on safety prevention on falls and slips

- Preventing Resident Falls in Long-Term Care. 16 min. 2003.

Guns and Knives

It is strongly advised that guns, knives and other weapons be removed from the home of anyone with Dementia. The person with Alzheimer's disease has decreased ability to safely use a gun or knife. Some people with Alzheimer's disease can exhibit physical aggressiveness and others may mistake a friend or family member for an intruder. Having access to a gun or knife may increase the chances of a tragic accident or of a person with dementia harming him or herself.

Medications

People with Alzheimer's disease are at an increased risk of making medication errors. As the caregiver, your role in decisions about medication and proper use of medication increases significantly as the dementia symptoms progress.

- National Association of Social Workers **Help Starts Here**—website article that addresses the issues of medication errors and things you can do to avoid them. See [Healthy Lifestyles – Your Options: Avoiding Medication Errors](#).
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration—provides a booklet titled “[Safe Medicine Use & Poison Prevention Tips A Guide for Older Adults and Caregivers](#)”

Poisons and Hazardous Material

As memory loss progresses, use of good judgment becomes less. Your loved one could mistake a poisonous or hazardous product such as everyday cleaning materials for something to eat or drink. Taking some basic precautions may help in keeping your loved one away from potentially hazardous materials. Keep cleaning materials stored in a separate area from foods and beverages and consider locking or installing alarms on cabinets with such materials. Refrigerators can also pose potential threats, including glass jars or raw meat. Consider installing latches out of view to limit access.

- [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration](#)—National toll-free poison control number (1-800-222-1222).

Scams, Fraud, Crime

Many individuals are taken advantage of, are targets of financial exploitation, robbery, purse snatching, car theft, home repair scams, phone solicitors, and even burglars. Because of their vulnerability, people with Alzheimer's disease run a higher risk of being victims of scams, fraud, and crime. Although you may not be able to protect your loved one from all scams or intruders, you can take some basic precautions:

- Put up a “no solicitation” sign.
- Call the national “Do Not Call” Registry (1-888-382-1222).
- Remove a person's name from the credit bureau's mailing list. Call the Consumer Credit and Reporting Industry at 1-888-567-8688.

Internet Resources for Fraud Safety

- [Federal Trade Commission](#)—information about different types of scams and how to recognize these scams. The website has a link to report phone fraud (the complaint will help law enforcement officials find and stop the scam artists).
- [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#)—government website that helps to recognize common fraud schemes dealing with senior citizens.

Wandering (Getting Lost)

We know that the majority of people with Alzheimer's disease will wander or become lost. Most individuals who wander have an increased risk of wandering more than once. If the person is not located within 24 hours, serious injury or even death occurs in up to 50% of instances. Please call the Alzheimer's Association 24-Hour Helpline (1-800-272-3900) to inquire about our MedicAlert+Safe Return program and other tips on ways to reduce wandering behavior.

- For a list of safety products please refer to the safety service resource list.
- [Alzheimer's Association Safety Center](#)—contains tips on home safety, wandering, driving, disaster preparedness, Medic Alert + Safe Return and Comfort Zone. Also, we have many tip sheets and brochures to help with safety concerns (see [Safety Topics](#)).
- [Mayo Clinic](#)—information on wandering and tips on safety.

Books and Videos relating to wandering

- Dementia and Wandering Behavior: Concern for the Lost Elder. Nina M. Silverstein, Gerald Flaherty, Terri Salmons Tobin. 2002.
- The Complete Guide to Alzheimer's-Proofing Your Home. Mark L. Warner. 2000.
- Alzheimer's Disease and Wandering Behaviors. 27 min. 2001.
- Saving Lives Together (Alzheimer's Association Safe Return & Law Enforcement). 13:24 min. 2005-06.
- Wandering—Is It a Problem? 15 min. 1999.

For information, questions, emotional support or care consultation, you can always call the 24-hour, multi-language **Alzheimer's Association Helpline at (800) 272-3900** or visit the website: <http://www.alzstl.org>.

Is my loved one able to be LEFT alone?

This informational questionnaire helps you evaluate if your loved one could be **left** alone, even for short periods of time. You need to evaluate frequently because abilities decrease over time. Always evaluate your loved one's abilities yourself. Do not rely on reports from your loved one because people with dementia can be clever at compensating for their deficits. Remember to consult a doctor when any sudden change occurs--sudden changes can mean serious health problems.

Please check the appropriate boxes. One or more checkmarks in a category may indicate a need for more supervision, more support, or a change in living arrangements.

Safety Concerns

My loved one...

- has accidents or falls because of weakness, dizziness, or the inability to get around.
- has problems using the stove, oven, or appliances because of forgetfulness.
- has access to and might attempt to drive an automobile if left alone.
- has had driving accidents (even minor ones).
- does not use mobility or assistance devices correctly (wheelchair, walker, cane).
- does not use the telephone correctly (unable to make phone calls in emergencies, gives information to inappropriate persons, buys things or makes donations).
- cannot problem-solve in an emergency situation.
- is likely to wander away from the house if left alone.
- has stairs or other hazardous conditions in the home (dark areas, throw rugs).
- cannot lock the home or set the security alarm at night or when going out.
- forgets to or inappropriately sets the air conditioning or furnace.
- creates personal safety hazards because of forgetfulness or carelessness (smoking, firearms, knives, letting in strangers, etc.).

Nutritional and Medical Needs

My loved one...

- cannot correctly shop, store, or cook food.
- is unable or unwilling to prepare nutritious meals.
- forgets to eat appropriate meals and forgets to drink enough liquids.
- forgets to take needed medications or takes incorrect dosages.

Personal Hygiene

My loved one...

- is unable to bathe and dress properly.
- is unable or unwilling to use the toilet appropriately.
- is unable to change clothing or bed linens as necessary to remain clean and dry.

Task Oriented Activities

My loved one...

- is unable to take care of his/her home.
- cannot pay bills on time, balance a checkbook accurately, or use credit cards appropriately.
- has not kept up with usual social and physical activities.

Is my loved one able to LIVE alone?

Use this informational questionnaire to evaluate whether your loved one could continue to **live** alone. You need to evaluate frequently because abilities decrease over time. Always evaluate your loved one's abilities yourself. Do not rely on reports from your loved one because people with dementia can be clever at compensating for their deficits. Remember to consult a doctor when any sudden change occurs--sudden changes can mean serious health problems.

Please check the appropriate boxes. One or more checkmarks in a category may indicate a need for more supervision, more support, or a change in living arrangements.

Safety Concerns

My loved one...

- has driving accidents, even minor ones.
- has been wandering, pacing, or fretting more than before.
- lets pots burn on the stove or forgets to turn off the burners or oven.
- forgets to put out cigarettes properly.
- lets strangers into the house, opens doors for anyone, or locks himself or herself out.
- demonstrates mood swings and suspicious behaviors.

Task Oriented Activities

My loved one...

- cannot take care of the home or apartment.
- cannot pay bills on time or balance a checkbook accurately.
- cannot shop, store, or cook food correctly.
- cannot use the phone properly, handle an answering machine, or remember important numbers.
- cannot take medications on time or in the right dosages.
- cannot lock the home at night or when going out (or set a security system).

Personal Care Activities

My loved one...

- cannot keep up with usual social and physical activities.
- cannot eat well-balanced meals or drink plenty of liquids.
- cannot bathe and dress properly.
- cannot use the toilet correctly.

Note: When home safety issues indicate that your loved one needs more support, more supervision, or even a change in living arrangements, please refer to the resources listed on the following pages. You can always reach us at the Alzheimer's Association 24-hour Helpline at 1-800-272-3900.