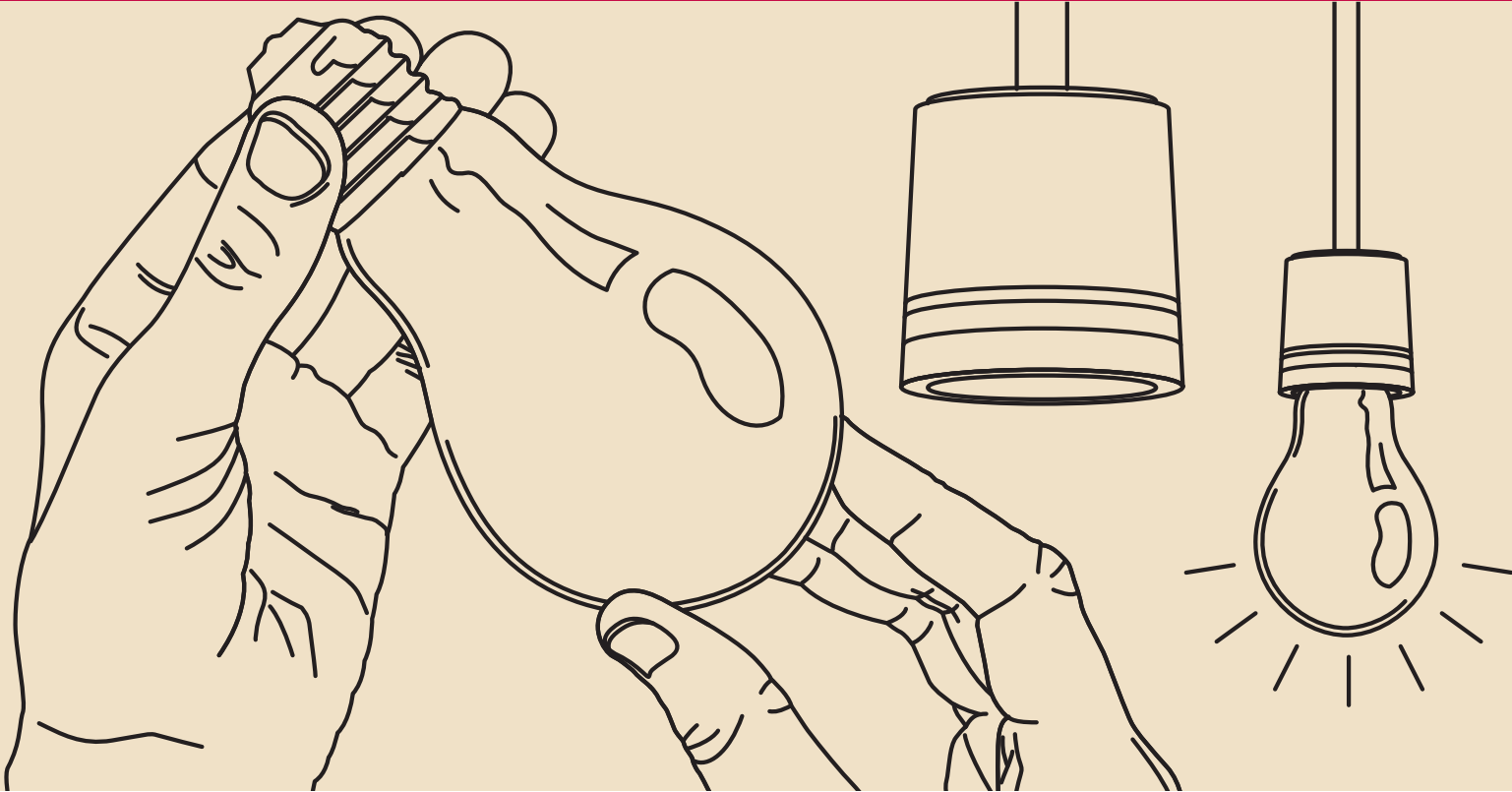


# Your Safety



## Preventing accidents in your home

Advice for older people

In association with

**ROSPA**  
The Royal Society for the  
Prevention of Accidents

## Help the Aged produces a range of free advice leaflets for older people

### Financial leaflets

- Can You Claim It?
- Check Your Tax
- Claiming Disability Benefits
- Questions on Pensions
- Thinking About Money
- Making a Will

### Housing and home safety leaflets

- Care Homes
- Computers and the Internet
- Help in Your Home
- Housing Matters
- Keep Out the Cold
- Your Safety
- Your Security

### Health leaflets

- Bereavement
- Better Hearing
- Better Sight
- Bladder and Bowel Weakness
- Elder Abuse
- Fitter Feet
- Healthy Bones
- Healthy Eating
- Keeping Mobile
- Managing Your Medicines
- Shingles
- Staying Steady

Leaflets are free of charge and available from the Information Resources Team at the address on the back page, email [adviceleaflets@helptheaged.org.uk](mailto:adviceleaflets@helptheaged.org.uk) or fax 0870 770 3282.

The advice in this leaflet was written in association with RoSPA, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents.

If you would like this leaflet in another format, such as large print or audio tape, please contact the Information Resources Team on **020 7278 1114**.

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**Most of us feel pretty safe in our homes. Yet more accidents happen at home than anywhere else. This leaflet is about the simple things you can do to make your home and garden safer.**

If you would like advice on making your home secure, or on personal safety when you are out, see our free advice leaflet *Your Security*.

## **Moving about at home**

Many accidents in the home are caused by slipping, tripping and bumping into things. In this section we look at ways to improve your balance and make moving around your home safer. A lot of this advice is common sense – but even small adjustments can make life easier.

- Keep as active as possible. Regular physical activity helps to improve your balance and keep your muscles strong. Our free advice leaflet *Keeping Mobile* has more tips on staying independent and active.
- Eating a diet rich in calcium and vitamin D, and taking regular, weight-bearing exercise will help keep your bones healthy and reduce the risk of breaks or fractures. See our free advice leaflet *Healthy Bones* for more information.
- Keeping an eye out for things that could cause you to slip or trip can make your home safer to live in. For example, remember to keep the floor clear of trailing flexes and rucked-up or fraying carpets that you might trip over or slip on. If you have a pet, take care not to let it get under your feet.

- Good lighting is very important, particularly on the stairs.
- Fitting handrails to your stairs can make them easier and safer to climb. Make sure your stairs and floors are free of clutter. Don't leave items on the stairs to be taken up later.
- Does the layout of your home help or hinder you? You could think about rearranging your furniture so that you can move around your home more easily.
- Have your eyes checked regularly. Eye tests are free if you are aged 60 or over. For more information, see our free advice leaflet *Better Sight*. Remember that reading glasses or bifocal or varifocal lenses can make objects and surfaces appear closer than they really are. This could cause you to trip or lose your balance. If you think this could be a problem for you, ask your optician for advice.
- Raising your arms and tipping your head back: for example, to clean windows or change a light bulb, can make some people light-headed and dizzy. If this happens to you, avoid this sort of task and ask for help from a friend, neighbour or relative.

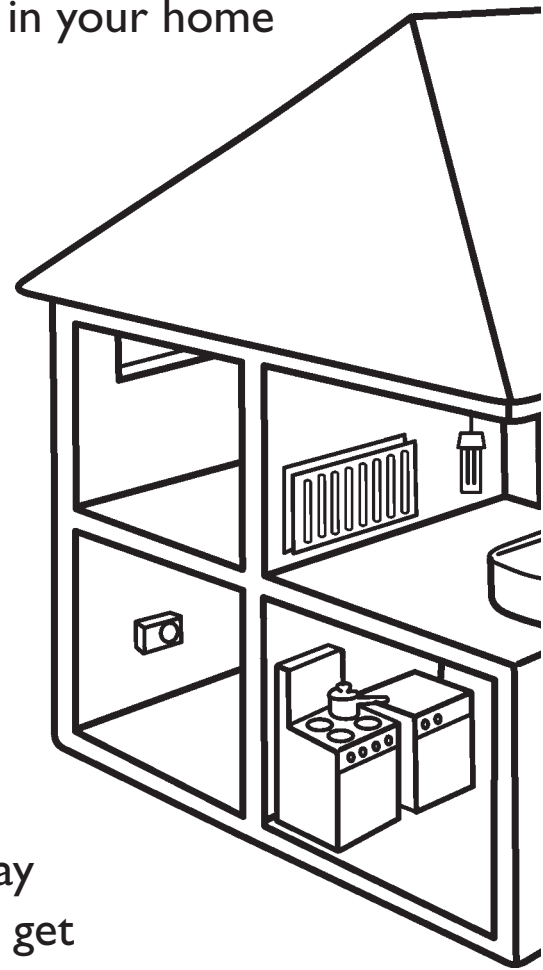
For more information on improving strength and balance, and reducing the risk of falling, see our free advice leaflet *Staying Steady*.

## Safety around the home

Just a few small changes can make each room in your home a safer place.

### In the kitchen

- Make sure that there is a clear space near the sink and cooker so that you can put hot pans down safely.
- Place things that you use every day within easy reach. You can avoid stretching up to reach high shelves or bending down into low cupboards by using long-handled 'grabbers' to extend your reach.
- Always remember to turn pan handles away from the front of the cooker so they don't get knocked over.
- Keep an eye on the cooker when it is switched on. Be especially careful not to leave a chip pan, frying pan or grill pan unattended as fat can catch fire very quickly if it gets too hot.
- Before frying food, dry it off with kitchen paper or a clean tea towel to prevent the hot fat splashing when you put the food in the pan.
- Use a timer to remind you that you've left something cooking.
- If your chip pan or frying pan does catch fire, try to stay calm. **Don't take any risks** – get everyone out of your home and call the fire and rescue service. **Never pour water on to the pan and never try to move the pan while it is hot.** Turn off the heat under the pan if it's safe to do so and allow





it to cool completely. Always call the fire and rescue service, even if the fire appears to be out.

- If you spill something on the floor, try to clean it up straight away.

### In the bathroom

- To avoid scalding, either run the cold water before the hot, or run the taps together.
- A well-placed hand rail, bath seat and non-slip bath mat can help you keep your balance when you are getting in and out of the bath. The **Disabled Living Foundation** can advise on equipment that might best help you.

- **Never** use mains-powered electrical appliances in the bathroom.
- Keep all medicines in the bottles they came in, out of reach of children and pets and, ideally, locked away. For more information on taking medicines safely, see our free advice leaflet *Managing Your Medicines*.

### In the bedroom

- Check that your bed is the right height. When you are sitting on the edge, the soles of your feet should touch the floor and you should be able to stand up easily.
- It is easy to trip up when you first get out of bed. Watch out for sheets and bed covers trailing on the floor.
- Keep a bedside lamp or torch within easy reach in case you need to get up in the night. This could also be useful if there is a power failure.

## Safety in the garden

Safety is just as important outside the house as it is inside. Keeping your garden tidy and free of obstacles goes a long way to making it safer.

- Watch out for uneven paths and slippery surfaces. Keep paths clear of leaves and overgrowing plants.
- Be careful of your eyes where there are overhanging trees and shrubs and unprotected canes or stakes.
- If you have to use a ladder in the garden, make sure it is in good condition, standing at a safe angle and anchored at its base. You should always try to have someone with you who can hold the ladder steady; this will make it safer.
- Always use tools carefully and place them in a safe position when you put them to one side. Make sure you put tools away once you have finished using them.
- When using power tools and electric mowers, use a power point fitted with a residual current device (RCD). This will shut off the power if an electrical fault develops or if you accidentally cut through the flex. You should **never** use electrical equipment in wet weather.
- Avoid the garden, if possible, when it's icy and slippery out.

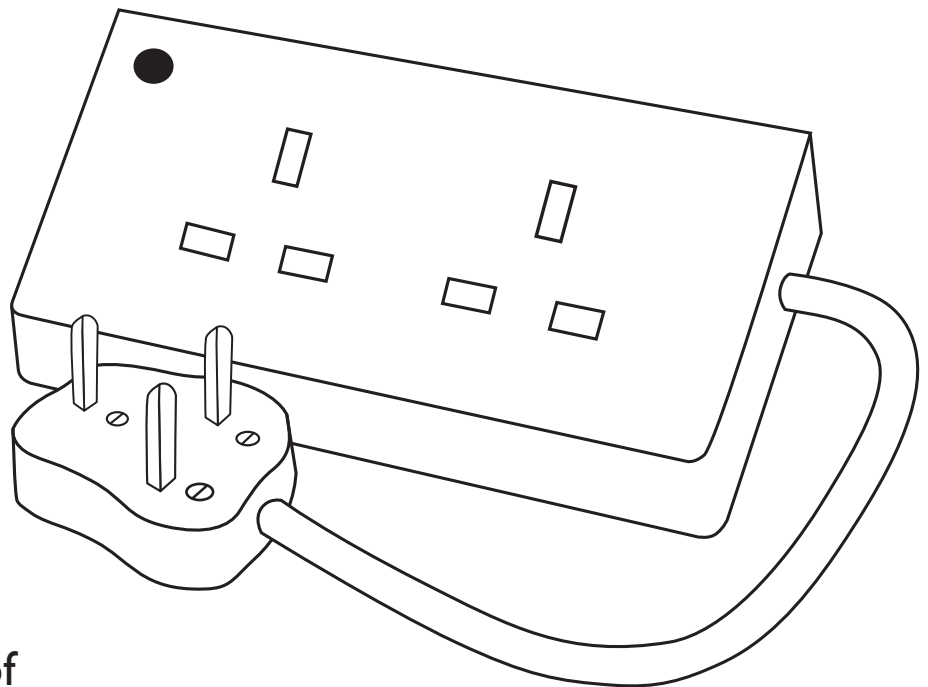
## Gas, electrical and fire safety

- Get all gas and electrical appliances checked regularly. If you're having an appliance fitted, always make sure you choose a qualified installer. For electrical installation work, look for membership of the **NICEIC**; tel. 0870 013 0382 or the **Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA)**; tel. 020 7313 4800. For gas appliances you must use an



installer registered with **CORGI**; tel. 0800 915 0485. Take special care if you are buying second-hand appliances.

- All electrical appliances should have a British Standard number and/or the European safety mark.
- The National Association for Professional Inspectors and Testers (NAPIT) can provide details of qualified electricians and installers. Contact it by phone on 0870 444 1392 or search for people in your area via its website, [www.napit.org.uk](http://www.napit.org.uk)
- Most people over 60 are entitled to an annual free gas safety check. Contact your gas company for more information. The phone number should be on the back of your bill.
- If you smell gas, ring the emergency number on **0800 111 999** (or 0800 002 001 in Northern Ireland).
- Keep electric fires and heaters, including mobile heaters, well away from bedclothes, furniture and curtains.
- Never overload power points. If you don't have enough sockets do not use a block adaptor – use a bar adaptor on a lead. But for appliances which use a lot of power, such as heaters, irons and kettles, never fit more than one plug in each socket.

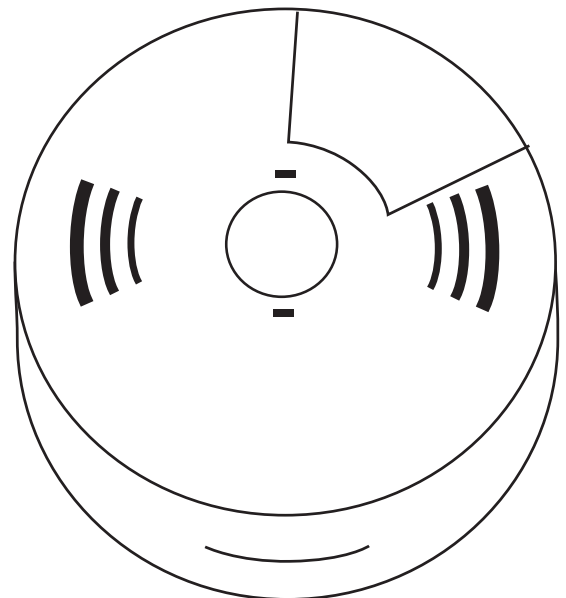


- If you have an electric blanket, make sure you get it serviced regularly and check for danger signs such as fraying, a worn flex and scorch marks. Unplug your electric blanket when you go to bed, unless you are absolutely sure it is the type that can be left on overnight. When you are not using it, store your blanket flat or rolled – never fold it. If your blanket accidentally gets wet, don't use it until it is completely dry.
- If you smoke, use deep ashtrays and stub each cigarette out properly. Before leaving the house or going to bed, wet the ash and cigarette butts under a tap and throw them away into a safe container such as a metal waste-bin.
- **Never** smoke in bed.
- Do not use energy-saving light bulbs with dimmer switches, unless you buy a special 'dimmable' energy-saving bulb.

## Smoke alarms

Smoke alarms can give you valuable extra time to escape from a fire and may even save your life. It is very important to install one in your home.

- Hard-wired alarms, wired directly into your electrical system, and 10 year alarms are preferable, as they require less maintenance than one year alarms.
- Always look for an alarm that conforms to British Standard BS5466 and carries the kite mark.
- Make sure you can hear an alarm wherever you are in your home – particularly when you are asleep. If you are deaf or



hard of hearing you can get special alarms with a flashing light or a vibrating pad that can be placed under your pillow or mattress at night. Contact the RNID shop on 01733 361199 (or textphone 01733 238020).

- Test your smoke alarm weekly and keep it free from dust. Twice a year open the case of the alarm and gently vacuum it to remove dust from the sensor. Change the battery at least once a year.
- If you find it difficult to fit the alarm by yourself, you could ask a neighbour, family member, or local voluntary organisation to help. In some areas of the UK, Help the Aged runs a HandyVan home safety service which fits alarms. To find out if the service operates in your area call **01255 473999**.
- Most fire and rescue services offer a Home Fire Risk Check (HFRC) where they carry out a survey of your home and give you simple advice on fire safety issues. They can also fit free smoke alarms if needed. You are entitled to a free HFRC. Contact your local fire and rescue service for details – you will find their main number in your phone book. Or visit the Fire Kills website at [www.firekills.gov.uk](http://www.firekills.gov.uk).
- Be prepared – make sure you know your fire escape route, especially if you live in a block of flats or somewhere without direct access to the street. Keep the exits from your home clear so that you can escape if there is a fire.

## Protect yourself against carbon monoxide

Heaters that burn gas, coal, oil or wood can give off **carbon monoxide** if they are not working properly. You can't see or smell carbon monoxide gas, but it is extremely poisonous.

You can buy carbon monoxide detectors; look for the European Standard number BS EN 50291. Never rely entirely on a carbon monoxide detector; a detector should only be used as an **extra** safety measure.

You should have heating appliances serviced regularly, and get chimneys and flues cleaned regularly too. It is also important to keep rooms well ventilated and make sure that air bricks and ventilators are not blocked.

For more advice on carbon monoxide safety call the Health and Safety Executive Gas Safety Advice Line on **0800 300 363** or visit its website at [www.hse.gov.uk/gas](http://www.hse.gov.uk/gas)

## Emergencies

Most people who live on their own never have a serious accident. However, it is always worth preparing for the unexpected.

- Keep the phone numbers of your gas, electricity and water suppliers somewhere obvious – just in case you need to contact them quickly.
- Pin details of your doctor and close relatives or friends in an obvious place, perhaps behind the front door, so that people know whom to contact in an emergency.
- The best people to help in an emergency are those living nearby. If you arrange a daily telephone call or quick visit to or from a neighbour, they will know when something is wrong – but remember to let them know if you plan to be away.

## Community alarms

If you worry about having an accident or falling ill while you are alone at home, you might want to think about getting a **community alarm**. These alarms let you contact a 24-hour response centre from anywhere in your home.

Staff at the centre will then contact the best person to help you – perhaps a neighbour, relative or friend, or the emergency services.

Many local councils run community alarm schemes. Contact your council's housing department for more information. Help the Aged runs its own immediate-response helpline, called **SeniorLink**. For more information call **0845 053 2306** (or 0808 100 2435 in Northern Ireland).



## Useful contacts

### Disabled Living Foundation

380–384 Harrow Road  
London W9 2HU

Helpline: 0845 130 9177

Web: [www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk)

Provides impartial advice on products and equipment to help with daily living.

### The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

Information Centre  
Edgbaston Park  
353 Bristol Road  
Birmingham B5 7ST

Tel: 0121 248 2130

Web: [www.rospa.org.uk](http://www.rospa.org.uk)

Provides detailed advice on specific safety problems.

## Contacting our services

### Home support

**Gifted Housing** A unique range of support services and care benefits provided to home donors. Call 01225 447 800.

**HandyVan** A free home security and safety service offered to older people who meet a charitable criteria. Call 01255 473 999 for more information.

**Home shopping** High-quality, affordable items to make everyday living easier, safer, more comfortable and more enjoyable. Shop online at [www.helptheaged.org.uk/shopping](http://www.helptheaged.org.uk/shopping) or call 0800 169 1609 for a catalogue.

**Insurance** Home cover. Call 0800 022 3175 or visit [www.intunegroup.co.uk/home](http://www.intunegroup.co.uk/home)\*

**SeniorLink** A home telephone service that connects you to a response centre for emergency assistance or reassurance (24 hours). Call 0845 053 2306.

### Information and advice

**Care Fees Advice Service** Specialist advice for anyone entering or already in care, regardless of means. Call freephone 0500 76 74 76 or visit [www.helptheaged.org.uk/carefees](http://www.helptheaged.org.uk/carefees)

**SeniorLine** In Great Britain, call freephone 0808 800 6565 or, in Northern Ireland, 0808 808 7575 for free, confidential and impartial advice on benefits, care and housing issues.

**Equity Release Service** Impartial, whole-of-market advice on all aspects of equity release. Call 0845 2300 820 or visit [www.intunegroup.co.uk/equityrelease](http://www.intunegroup.co.uk/equityrelease)\*

**Wills Advice Service** Free, confidential advice about making a will, for people of state retirement age. Call 020 7239 1965 for a free information pack.

### Community living

**Insurance** Travel insurance with no age barriers. Call 0800 022 3176 or visit [www.intunegroup.co.uk/travel](http://www.intunegroup.co.uk/travel)\*

**Insurance** Motor insurance with no age barriers. Call 0800 022 3174 or visit [www.intunegroup.co.uk/motor](http://www.intunegroup.co.uk/motor)\*

**SeniorMobility** Helping older people's groups and projects to purchase vehicles and transport equipment.

\* **intune group ltd** is a wholly owned subsidiary of Help the Aged. Any profits generated from selling products go directly to support charitable activities.

Help the Aged distributes over 3 million advice leaflets a year. This service is currently provided free of charge, thanks to the generosity of our supporters. If you found this leaflet useful and would like to make a donation, phone 020 7239 1983 quoting ref **IRT** or send a cheque or postal order, for the attention of Information Resources, to the address below.

November 2008

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Fighting for disadvantaged older people in the UK and overseas,

**WE WILL:**

**COMBAT POVERTY** wherever older people's lives are blighted by lack of money, and cut the number of preventable deaths from hunger, cold and disease

**REDUCE ISOLATION** so that older people no longer feel confined to their own home, forgotten or cut off from society

**CHALLENGE NEGLECT** to ensure that older people do not suffer inadequate health and social care, or the threat of abuse

**DEFEAT AGEISM** to ensure that older people are not ignored or denied the dignity and equality that are theirs by right

**PREVENT FUTURE DEPRIVATION** by improving prospects for employment, health and well-being so that dependence in later life is reduced

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**HELPTHEAGED** WE WILL<sup>®</sup>