
Patient Safety

Main Number: 203 739-8300

Toll Free Number: 888 357-3334

www.RegionalHospiceCT.org

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Home accidents are a major cause of injury and death, especially for those over 60. As people grow older, they may be less agile and their bones tend to break more easily. A simple fall can result in a disabling injury. All patients need to take special precautions to ensure a safe living environment.

Eliminating hazards can prevent most home accidents. Review the following safety guidelines to determine what you can do to make your home a safer place to live. Keep emergency phone numbers posted by each telephone.

Please speak with your nurse/therapist or call the agency at any time if you have any concerns or questions about patient safety.

Preventing falls

- Keep stairways and halls well lit. Use night-lights in bathrooms, halls and passageways.
- A flashlight with good batteries or a lamp should be within easy reach of your bed.
- Remove throw rugs or have rugs with a nonskid backing. Do not use throw rugs in high traffic areas.
- Keep clutter cleared from the house, especially from pathways.
- Electrical and telephone cords should be placed along walls—not under rugs. They should be kept away from traffic areas and never cross pathways.
- Step stools should have high handrails.
- All stairs should have securely fastened handrails.
- Install grab bars by the shower, tub and toilet.
- Use a shower stool or attach nonskid strips to the bottom of tub.
- Elevate toilet seats and stools, if needed.
- Clean up spills immediately.
- Keep outside walks clear of snow and ice in the winter.
- Outside steps and entrances must be well lit.
- Be aware of any medications being taken that may cause dizziness or unsteadiness.
- When in a seated or lying down position, stand up slowly.
- A cane can be used for extra stability.
- Steps should have nonskid strips or carpeting that is securely fastened and free from holes and fraying.
- Place light switches at the top and bottom of stairways and at both ends of long halls.
- Doors should not swing out over stair steps.
- Make sure there is adequate headroom in stairways.
- Porches, balconies, terraces and other elevations or depressions should have railings or otherwise be protected.

Electrical safety

- Keep electrical appliances and cords clean, in good condition and do not expose them to water or other liquids.
- Electrical equipment should have the Underwriters Labs (UL) label.
- Electrical outlets should be grounded and not overloaded.
- Make sure to use adequate lighting throughout the house and replace burned out bulbs.

Kitchen safety

- Stove and sink areas should be well lit.
- Keep curtains away from the stove and other open flame areas.
- Keep counter space clean and uncluttered.
- Turn pan handles away from burners and the edge of the stove.
- Use pan holders for all hot pots or pans.
- Operate the microwave oven only when food is in it.
- Store heavy items within easy reach.
- Do not cook oils and fat on high heat.
- Do not wear clothing with loose sleeves when cooking.
- Avoid food poisoning by properly storing and refrigerating perishable foods. Check regularly for freshness and expiration dates.
- Make sure to turn off kitchen appliances when not in use.

Bathroom safety

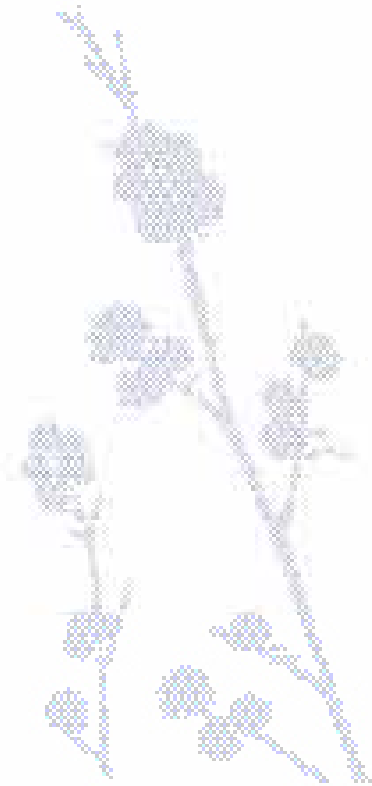
- Use nonskid mat or strips in bathtub/shower and standing areas.
- Bathtub or shower doors should be glazed with safety glass or plastic.
- Install grab bars on the walls by the bathtub and toilet.
- Make sure the soap dish and towel bars are made of durable materials and firmly installed—do not use them as grab bars.
- Keep electrical appliances (radio, TV, heater) away from the bathtub/shower area.
- Set the water heater thermostat below 120°F to prevent accidental scalding.
- Use night-lights to brighten the way to the bathroom at night.

Hazardous items and poisons

- Use care when storing hazardous items, and only store in their original containers.
- Know how to contact your poison control team.
- Do not mix products that contain chlorine or bleach with other chemicals.
- Properly store or dispose of insecticides.
- Keep all hazardous items, cleaners, and chemicals out of reach of children and confused or impaired adults.
- Dispose of household trash in a covered waste receptacle outside of the home.

The national poison hotline can be reached at: (800) 222-1222

Medication safety



- *Do not* take medications that are prescribed for someone else.
- Make a list of all your medications (including prescription, over-the-counter, vitamins, herbals). Show this list to your doctor or pharmacist to keep from combining drugs inappropriately. If there are any changes, add them to the list immediately.
- Know the name of each of your medicines; why you take it; how to take it; potential side effects; and what foods or other things to avoid while taking it.
- Report medication allergies or side effects to your healthcare provider.
- Take medications exactly as instructed. If the medication looks different than you expect, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist about it.
- Drug names can look alike or sound alike. To avoid errors, check with your health care provider if you have any questions.
- Many medications interact with alcohol—be cautious.
- Do not stop or change medications without your doctor's approval, even if you are feeling better. If you miss a dose, do not double the next dose later.
- You can use a chart or container system (med-planner) to help you remember what kind, how much, and when to take medicine.
- Read labels (and warnings) carefully, with adequate lighting, and keep medications in their original containers.
- Store medications safely in a cool/dry place according to instructions on the label.
- Keep medicines away from children and confused adults.
- **Federal disposal guidelines for medications:** Remove drugs from their original containers. Mix drugs with an undesirable substance like coffee grounds or kitty litter. Put the mix in an empty can or sealable bag and throw it in the trash. Some medications can be flushed down the toilet, but check the prescription label or patient information before doing so. If your community has a pharmaceutical take-back program, take your unused drugs to them for proper disposal.

Medical equipment/ oxygen

- Follow manufacturer's instructions for providing a proper environment for specialized medical equipment, and keep a copy of any instructions with or near the equipment.
- Routine/preventive maintenance should be performed according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Have phone numbers for service/repair available.
- Have backup equipment and battery backup power available.
- Bedside rails must be properly installed and used when necessary.
- The mattress must fit the bed. Excess space between the mattress and bedside rails could allow the patient to be trapped.

- **Never smoke around oxygen.**
- Do not allow oxygen to freeze or overheat. Keep oxygen equipment away from open flame.
- Place oxygen cylinders in appropriate stand to prevent tipping, secured to the wall or placed on their side on the floor. Store in a well-ventilated area and not under outside porches or decks or in the trunk of a car.
- If you have electrically powered equipment, such as oxygen or a ventilator, register with your local utility company.

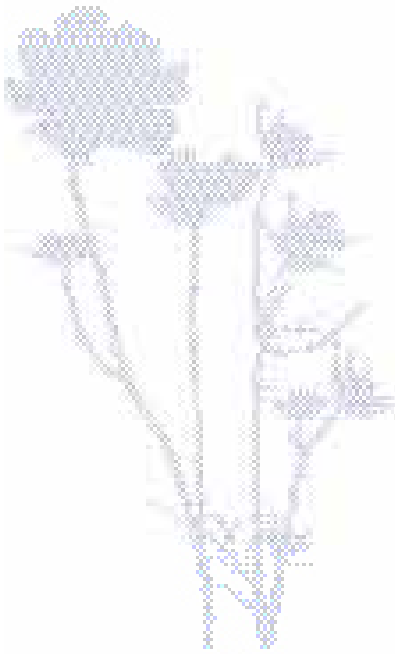
Fire safety precautions

- All family members and caregivers should be familiar with emergency 911 procedures.
- Notify the fire department if a disabled person is in the home.
- **Do not** smoke in bed or when oxygen equipment is being used.
- Have a qualified maintenance company check and clean the heating system regularly. Space heaters should be used only according to the manufacturer's specifications.
- Know your fire escape routes and have two planned exits. If you live in an apartment building, or multi-family home, know the location of exit stairs.
- Keep hallways clean.
- Do not use elevators in a fire emergency.
- Post the fire department number for easy viewing at all times.
- Have an accessible fire extinguisher that is checked regularly.
- Install smoke detectors in hallways and near sleeping areas. Replace batteries when you change your clocks for daylight savings time in the spring and fall.
- If your fire escape is cut off, remain calm, close the door and seal cracks to hold back smoke. Signal for help at the window.
- A **bed bound patient** can be evacuated to a safe area by placing him/her on a sturdy blanket and pulling/dragging the patient out of home.
- Remember, life safety is first, but if the fire is contained and small, you may be able to use a fire extinguisher until the fire department arrives.

Severe weather/ lightening/ floods

If bad weather such as severe storms, tornadoes, snow and/or ice storms, flooding, etc., is forecast, listen to your local radio station for updated information and seek shelter as indicated.

- **Floods** are the most common and widespread of all natural hazards. Some floods can develop over a period of days, but flash floods can result in raging waters in just a few minutes. Be aware of flood hazards, especially if you live in a low-lying area, near water or downstream from a dam.



- **Tornadoes** are nature's most violent storms. When a tornado has been sighted, get to your shelter immediately. Stay away from windows, doors and outside walls.
- **Lightning** that occurs with storms can still be dangerous inside a home. Avoid bathtubs, water faucets and sinks because metal pipes can conduct electricity. Stay away from windows. Avoid using the telephone, except for emergencies. If outside, do not stand underneath natural lightning rods, such as a tall, isolated tree in an open area. Get away from anything metal, including tractors, farm equipment, bicycles, etc.
- **Hurricanes** can immobilize an entire region. Heavy rains and high wind cause flooding and damage. Preparation is the key to surviving a hurricane: keeping informed of the storm's path and anticipated arrival, assembling disaster supplies, securing your home and evacuating to a shelter if necessary.
- **Winter Storms** with heavy snowfall, ice and extreme cold can immobilize entire regions, block roads and down power lines. Stay aware of current weather reports and consider staying with family/friends who are near major roads if you live in a remote area. Wear several layers of loose-fitting, light-weight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing; tightly woven, water repellent outer garments; mittens (warmer than gloves); and a hat since most body heat is lost through the top of the head; and avoid going outdoors.
- **Extreme Hot Weather** precautions include opening windows and using fans or air conditioning. Heat can cause dehydration—drink plenty of liquids.

Additional weather precautions

- Mobile homes are not safe in high winds, so seek shelter elsewhere.
- Stay indoors unless ordered to evacuate. If evacuation is necessary, be aware of routes ahead of time. Have an emergency supply kit ready to take with you. Notify Regional Hospice at: (203) 739-8300.
- Keep trees trimmed of dead branches that may pose a threat during high winds.

Power outages

While cordless phones are an important convenience, they will not work in a power outage. Make sure you have at least one phone that plugs directly into a wall and does not use electricity. If you have an emergency situation and our agency phone lines are down, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital emergency room.

Infection control at home

Cleanliness and good hygiene help prevent infection. “**Contaminated materials**” such as bandages, dressings or surgical gloves can spread infection, and harm the environment. If not disposed of properly, these items can injure trash handlers, family members and others who could come in contact with them.

Certain illnesses and treatments (i.e., chemotherapy, dialysis, AIDS, diabetes, burns) can make people more susceptible to infection. Your nurse will instruct you on the use of protective clothing (gowns/gloves) if they are necessary.

Notify your physician and/or home care staff if you develop any of the following signs and symptoms of infection:

- Pain/tenderness/redness or swelling of body part
- Inflamed skin/rash/sores/ulcers
- Fever or chills
- Painful urination
- Confusion
- Nausea/vomiting/diarrhea
- Sore throat/cough
- Increased tiredness/weakness
- Pus (green/yellow drainage)

You can help control infection by following these guidelines:

Hand washing

Wash your hands before and after giving any care to the patient (even if wearing gloves), before handling or eating foods, and after using the toilet, changing a diaper, handling soiled linens, touching pets, coughing, sneezing or blowing nose. Handwashing needs to be done frequently and correctly.

Soap and Water Procedure: When hands are visibly dirty or contaminated or soiled with blood or other body fluids, use soap and running water for washing your hands. Remove jewelry; use warm running water and soap (liquid soap is best); place hands together under water; and rub your hands together for at least 20 seconds. Wash all surfaces (wrists, palms, back of hands, between fingers, under fingernails). Clean any dirt from under nails. Rinse soap from hands and dry with a clean towel. Air-dry if clean towel is not available or if towel is shared with others. If using paper towel, throw it in the trash after use. Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet. Pat dry to avoid chapping and cracking. Apply hand lotion to help prevent and soothe dry skin.

Waterless Antiseptic Hand Cleanser Procedure: If hands are not visibly dirty or contaminated or soiled with blood or other body fluids, an alcohol-based hand rub may be used for routinely decontaminating hands. The antiseptic agent should contain 60-90% ethyl or isopropyl alcohol. When using a waterless antiseptic hand cleaner, make sure the cap or spout is open. Place a quantity of liquid or gel (about the size of a dime; or use the amount recommended by the product manufacturer) in the palm of one hand; rub hands vigorously, covering all surfaces of hands and fingers, until hands are dry.

Washing your hands is the single most important step in controlling the spread of infection.

Disposable Items and Equipment

Items which are not sharp including paper cups, tissues, dressings, soiled bandages, plastic equipment, urinary/suction catheters, disposable diapers, Chux, plastic tubing, medical gloves, etc.

Store medical supplies in a clean/dry area. Dispose of used items in waterproof (plastic) bags. Fasten securely and dispose of bag in the trash.

Non-Disposable Items and Equipment

Items which are not thrown away including: soiled laundry, dishes, thermometer, commode, walker, wheelchair, bath seat, suction machine, oxygen equipment, mattress, etc.

Soiled laundry should be washed apart from other household laundry in hot soapy water. Handle these items as little as possible to avoid spreading germs. Household liquid bleach should be added if viral contamination is present (a 1 part bleach to 10 parts water solution is recommended).

Equipment used by the patient should be cleaned immediately after use. Small items (except thermometers) should be washed in hot soapy water, rinsed and dried with clean towels. Household cleaners such as disinfectant, germicidal liquids or diluted bleach may be used to wipe off equipment. Follow equipment cleaning instructions and ask your nurse/therapist for clarification.

Thermometers should be wiped with alcohol before and after each use. Store in a clean, dry place.

Liquids may be discarded in the toilet and the container cleaned with hot, soapy water, rinsed with boiling water and allowed to dry.

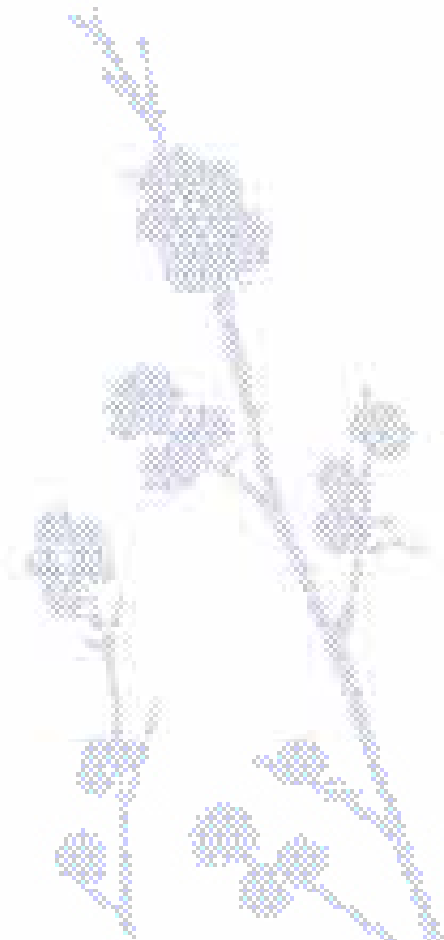
Sharp Objects

Items which are sharp including: needles, syringes, lancets, scissors, knives, staples, glass tubes or bottles, IV catheters, razor blades, disposable razors, etc.

Place used “**sharps**” directly into a clean rigid container with a screw-on or tightly secured lid. Use a hard plastic or metal container. Before discarding a container, reinforce the lid with heavy-duty tape. Never overfill the containers or recap needles once used. **DO NOT use glass** or clear plastic containers and never put sharps in containers that will be recycled or returned to a store. Seal the container with tape and place in the trashcan or dispose of according to area regulations.

Spills in the Home

Blood and other body fluids. Blood/body fluid spills are cleaned by putting on gloves and wiping fluid with paper towels. Use a cleaning solution of household bleach and water (1 cup of bleach to 10 cups of water) to wipe the area again. Double bag used paper towels and dispose of in the trash.



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