

# Home safety checker

Staying safe around the house



Home  
& care

***Age UK is the new force combining  
Age Concern and Help the Aged.***

***With almost 120 years of combined  
history to draw on, we are bringing  
together our talents, services  
and solutions to do more to enrich  
the lives of people in later life.***

***The Age UK family includes  
Age Cymru, Age NI and Age Scotland.***

This information leaflet has been prepared by Age UK and contains general advice only, which we hope will be useful. Nothing in this leaflet should be construed as specific advice and it should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action. Age UK does not accept any liability arising from its use. We aim to ensure that this information is as up to date and accurate as possible, but please be warned that certain areas are subject to change from time to time. Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, companies, products, services or publications in this information leaflet does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age UK.

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this leaflet is correct. However, things do change, so it is always a good idea to seek expert advice on your personal situation.

Date of publication: February 2011 © Age UK 2011

Age UK is the new force combining

**AGE**  
*Concern*

and

**HELPTHEAGED** WE WILL



# Contents

Introduction	2
General safety check for around the home	3
Safety in the bedroom	6
Safety in the kitchen	6
Safety on the stairs	8
Safety in the bathroom	9
Safety in the garden	10
Fire safety	11
Useful organisations	12

# Introduction

It's important that we feel safe in our homes, yet more accidents happen at home than anywhere else. We've put together this leaflet to help you do a safety check of your home. By working through the checklists, you should be able to identify and resolve any possible safety risks, and help prevent accidents.

Throughout this guide you will find suggestions for organisations that can give further information and advice about your options. Their contact details can be found in the 'Useful organisations' section (see pages 12–15). Contact details for local organisations can usually be found in your local phone book. If you have difficulty finding them, your local Age UK/Age Concern\* should be able to help (see page 12).

As far as possible, the information in this leaflet is applicable across the UK.

\*Many of our local partners will remain Age Concern for a while yet.

# General safety check for around the home

Here are a few general safety checks and some tips on how to make sure your home is safe.

## **Are your floors clear of trailing flexes?**

Coil or tape cords and wires close to the wall so that you don't trip over them. If you can, organise your appliances so that they are close to a socket.

## **Are you careful not to overload sockets?**

Overloaded sockets can be a fire hazard. If you don't have enough sockets, use a bar adapter on a lead rather than a block adapter. But for appliances that use a lot of power never fit more than one plug in each socket.

## **Can you walk through your rooms without having to walk around furniture?**

Rearranging your furniture can help you move around your home more easily.

## **Do you have worn out or fraying carpets that you might trip over?**

Replacing them or using double-sided carpet tape will help prevent them slipping.

## **Do you use a step ladder to change light bulbs?**

Step ladders give stability and safety when changing a light bulb or reaching for something high up.

### **Can you call for help if you fall or feel unsafe?**

A community alarm lets you contact a 24-hour response centre at the touch of a button. Many councils run community alarm schemes. Age UK offers community alarm services (see page 12).

### **Do you have an easy-to-read list of emergency phone numbers beside each phone?**

List details of important contacts, close friends, relatives and anyone else you think may be useful.

### **Do you have a carbon monoxide detector?**

Heaters that burn gas, coal, oil or wood can give off carbon monoxide if they are not working properly. Look for a detector bearing the kitemark and European Standard number BS EN 50291.

### **Have you organised a yearly gas appliances check?**

A yearly gas appliance check can ensure that your appliances are working safely. Make sure that the check or any repairs are done by a Gas Safe registered engineer. If you are a tenant, your landlord is legally required to arrange for gas appliances they provided to be checked for safety at least once a year. If you are an owner occupier, you may qualify for a free annual safety check from your energy supplier but you will have to register on the Priority Service Register; ask your supplier for details.

### **Do you have a letterbox cage?**

This can save you having to stoop to pick up your post. They also stop papers being spread across the floor, which could make you slip.

### **Do your slippers fit properly?**

Worn out or badly fitting slippers can increase your risk of falling. Be careful when wearing any long, loose-fitting clothing in case you trip.

### **When opening the door to a caller, do you lock, stop, chain and check?**

Always keep the chain on the door and ask for ID. If in doubt, keep them out. If you are suspicious of a caller, dial 999 and ask for the police.

Only chain your front door when you are planning to open it. Keeping a chain on all the time may prevent services from entering in an emergency.

---

***A community alarm  
lets you contact a  
24-hour response centre  
at the touch of a button.***

---



## *Safety in the bedroom*

### **Do you have sheets and bed covers trailing on the floor?**

Tuck them out of the way so they don't trip you up when you're moving around.

### **Do you have a bedside lamp or torch?**

This can help if you need to get up in the night, or if there is a power failure.

### **Do you have an electric blanket?**

You should get your electric blanket tested by an expert at least every three years, and replace it every ten years. Check for danger signs such as frayed fabric and scorch marks. Always unplug your electric blanket when you go to bed. Never switch it on if it is damp or wet.

## *Safety in the kitchen*

### **Is there clear counter space around or near the cooker?**

This will allow you to put hot pots and pans down safely.

### **Are the things you use every day within easy reach?**

Rearrange your shelves and cupboards so that the things you use most often can be reached easily, or use long-handled 'grabbers' to avoid stretching.

### **Are pan handles turned away from the front of the cooker?**

Keep pan handles towards the sides of your cooker to stop them being knocked over, and away from the other heat rings.

### **Do you use a timer to remind yourself when food is ready?**

Always set a timer so you don't forget about your cooking. Never leave hot oil unattended as it is a fire risk.

### **Is there a risk that you could slip on wet flooring?**

Try to clean up any spills straight away. Non-slip matting can help reduce the risk of slipping.

### **Are flammable items kept away from the hob?**

Make sure that tea towels, kitchen roll, oven gloves and paper bags are kept away from the cooker.

### **Do you keep your kitchen equipment as clean as possible?**

A build-up of crumbs or grease, for instance, could be a fire risk.

### **Do you know what to do if a pan catches fire?**

Don't move the pan or throw water on it. Turn off the heat if it is safe to do so. Do not try to put the fire out yourself using a wet tea towel, as you risk injuring yourself. Leave the kitchen, close the door and shout to everyone else in the house to leave. Call 999.

### **If you have a gas boiler, do you regularly check that the pilot light is burning?**

If you find it has gone out, there should be instructions on the boiler for how to relight it. If you cannot relight it yourself, call a heating engineer out. Make sure your engineer is Gas Safe registered.

# Safety on the stairs

## **Are your stairs free from clutter?**

Avoid storing things on stairs, even temporarily.

## **Do you have good lighting?**

Good lighting is particularly important on the stairs, where it can help you avoid tripping.

## **Do you have solid handrails, preferably on both sides?**

You should have handrails on all staircases, even on small flights.

## **Do you have a two-way light switch? This means a light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs.**

You should contact an electrician to fit one if you don't.

## **Can you easily see the edges of each step?**

Marking the edge of each step with paint or non-slip masking tape will make them more visible. Make sure that tape doesn't become a trip hazard.

## **Do you have plug-in night lights?**

These turn on automatically at night time and provide a low light that can help you see your way to the bathroom or on stairs if you get up at night.

## **Do you have emergency power-failure lights?**

These lights plug in to power sockets and remain lit if there is a power failure. This means that if the mains power fails after dark, you will still be able to find your way around.

# Safety in the bathroom

## **Do you have a hand rail, non-slip bath mat and bath seat?**

These can help you keep your balance when getting in and out of the bath. Make sure your bath mat is secure and doesn't slide on the floor when you walk on it. If you need help fitting a hand rail, or with other small home adaptations, contact HandyVan (see page 14).

## **Are your medicines stored in the bottle they came in, out of reach of children and pets, and locked away?**

The label will have information about what the medicine is and how often to take it. It will also have the phone number of the pharmacy so that you can call if you have any questions.

## **Are your mains-powered electrical appliances kept out of the bathroom?**

Appliances like hairdryers, heaters (unless fitted with a cord pull) and mains-powered radios should never be used in the bathroom. Contact your local council to see if it can provide you with bathroom safety equipment or financial help towards the cost. Our free guide *Adapting your home* and free factsheet *Funding repairs, improvements and adaptations* have more information.

# Safety in the garden

## **Are your paths clear of leaves and overgrowing plants?**

Keeping your garden tidy and free of obstacles will make it a lot safer.

## **Are your paving stones free from moss and algae?**

Moss and algae become very slippery when wet.

Prevent them growing by pruning overhanging branches to improve the light and air circulation. You can clear them using a power washer.

## **Do you take extra care if you have to go out in icy weather?**

Spread salt or sand on your steps if you need to go outside. Shoes and boots with good grip will also help prevent falls.

## **If you use a ladder, is it at a safe angle and anchored at its base?**

Never use a ladder when you are on your own; it is far safer to have someone with you who can hold the ladder steady.

## **Do you lock tools away once you have finished using them?**

Always use tools carefully and place them in a safe position when you put them down.

## **Do you use a power point fitted with a residual current device (RCD) when using power tools and electric mowers?**

An RCD will shut off the power if an electrical fault develops or if you accidentally cut through the flex.

# Fire safety

## **Do you smoke?**

If so, use deep ashtrays and stub each cigarette out properly. Never smoke in bed.

## **Do you have a smoke alarm on each floor?**

It is vital to have one bearing the British Standard number BS5446 and the kitemark. Test it regularly and keep it free from dust. Change the battery at least once a year. There are also special smoke alarms for people with hearing difficulties.

## **Have you planned a fire escape route?**

Preparing and planning an escape route can save valuable time in a fire. If you live in a flat, make sure corridors and stairs are free from clutter. If there is an alternative escape route, check you know how to use it.

## **Have you planned a Home Fire Risk Check?**

Contact your local fire brigade to see if it offers a Home Fire Risk Check; it can help you install smoke alarms, plan escape routes and assess other hazards.

## **If you have an open fire, do you use a fire guard?**

Fire guards let you safely enjoy the benefits of a fire.

## **Are you careful to never dry clothes over or near a fire?**

Drying clothes near a fire or other heater can be a fire risk.

# Useful organisations

## **Age UK**

Age UK is the new force combining Age Concern and Help the Aged. We provide advice and information for people in later life through our Age UK Advice line, publications and online.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65

[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

In Wales, contact

**Age Cymru:** 0800 169 65 65

[www.agecymru.org.uk](http://www.agecymru.org.uk)

In Northern Ireland, contact

**Age NI:** 0808 808 7575

[www.ageni.org](http://www.ageni.org)

In Scotland, contact

**Age Scotland:** 0845 125 9732

[www.agescotland.org.uk](http://www.agescotland.org.uk)

To contact your local Age UK/Age Concern, call Age UK Advice free on 0800 169 65 65 or visit [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

For products and services for the over-50s, including home insurance and personal alarms, call 0800 169 18 19.

Age UK runs an emergency alarm service called Age UK Personal Alarms. Call 0800 77 22 66 or visit [www.aidcall.co.uk/personalcare](http://www.aidcall.co.uk/personalcare)

Other Age UK guides that you may find useful:

*Care homes*

*Staying steady*

*Avoiding scams*

*Housing options*

*Staying safe*

*Adapting your home*

### **Disabled Living Foundation**

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

Tel: 0845 130 9177

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

### **Emergencies**

If you smell gas, call the gas emergency number on 0800 111 999 (National Grid).

In Northern Ireland, call 0800 002 001.

Carbon monoxide is known as a ‘silent killer’ because you can’t see, taste or smell it. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning can be similar to cold, flu or food poisoning symptoms – headache, feeling sick, sore throat and dry cough. If you suspect that carbon monoxide is present, call National Grid on 0800 111 999.

For oil: local OFTEC (Oil Firing Technical Association) engineer – call 0845 65 85 080.

For solid fuel: local HETAS (Heating Equipment Testing and Approval Scheme) engineer – call 0845 634 5626.

## **HandyVan**

Your local Age UK/Age Concern may provide a HandyVan service that aims to improve the quality of life and provide peace of mind to people in later life by making their homes more safe and secure. To find your local Age UK/Age Concern call 0800 169 65 65.

## **Home improvement agencies**

Help older home-owners and private tenants organise repairs, improvements and adaptations to their homes. The environmental health or housing department of your council, or a local Citizens Advice Bureau, should be able to tell you if there is a home improvement agency in your area.

In England contact:

### **Foundations**

Tel: 0845 864 5210  
[wwwFOUNDATIONS.uk.com](http://wwwFOUNDATIONS.uk.com)

In Scotland contact:

### **Care and Repair Forum**

Tel: 0141 221 9879  
[www.careandrepairscotland.co.uk](http://www.careandrepairscotland.co.uk)

In Wales contact:

### **Care and Repair Cymru**

Tel: 029 2057 6286  
[www.careandrepair.org.uk](http://www.careandrepair.org.uk)

In Northern Ireland contact:

### **Fold**

Tel: 028 9042 8314  
[www.foldgroup.co.uk](http://www.foldgroup.co.uk)

## **National Association for Professional Inspectors and Testers (NAPIT)**

Can provide details of qualified electricians and installers.

Tel: 0845 543 0330

[www.napit.org.uk](http://www.napit.org.uk)

## **RoSPA**

Provides detailed advice on specific safety problems.

Tel: 0121 248 2000

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

Some 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. Get in touch with your local authority (council) to find out how to register for a check.

## **Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)**

Provides a range of services, advice and leaflets for partially sighted and blind people.

Tel: 0303 123 9999

Email: [helpline@rnib.org.uk](mailto:helpline@rnib.org.uk)

[www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

## **Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)**

Can inform you of the services and equipment available to deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

Tel: 0808 808 0123 (freephone) or

0808 808 9000 (textphone)

Email: [informationline@rnid.org.uk](mailto:informationline@rnid.org.uk)

[www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)



---

*It's important that we feel safe in our homes. By working through the checklists, you should be able to identify and resolve any possible safety risks, and help prevent accidents.*

---



---

# What should I do now?

---

For more information on the issues covered in this leaflet, or to order any of our publications, please call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65** or visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/homeandcare](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/homeandcare)

Our publications are also available in large print and audio formats.

The following Age UK information guides may be useful:

- *Staying safe*
- *Avoiding scams*
- *Staying steady*

Age UK offers a wide range of products and services specially designed for people in later life. For more information, please call **0800 169 18 19**.

If contact details for your local Age UK/Age Concern\* are not in the box below, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.



\*Many of our local partners will remain Age Concern for a while yet.

Age UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England (registered charity number 1128267 and registered company number 6825798). The registered address is 207–221 Pentonville Road, London N1 9UZ. Age Concern England (registered charity number 261794) and Help the Aged (registered charity number 272786), and their trading and other associated companies merged on 1 April 2009. Together they have formed the Age UK Group, dedicated to improving the lives of people in later life. The three national Age Concerns in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have also merged with Help the Aged in these nations to form three registered charities: Age Scotland, Age NI and Age Cymru. ID8829 02/11