

Fire

All smoke alarms in your home should be tested once per week. A useful tip would be using a Helping Hand or brush shaft to test your alarm instead of having to climb in order to reach the button to avoid the risk of falling.

It is recommended to adapt and follow a night-time routine. This should involve switching off at wall all electrical appliances which are not suitable to leave running 24/7 and closing all internal doors (as this can prevent the spread of fire through the home by up to 215 minutes giving you time to get out). Remember not to leave doors open for pets.

It only takes a moments distraction for a fire to start – keep candles out of reach of children and pets.

Candles - Treat lit candles as you would any other flame.

- Don't leave them unattended
- Put them out completely at night
- Keep candles away from anything that can catch fire like furnishings, fabrics, curtains etc.
- Candles and tea lights can melt plastic surfaces like the tops of televisions and bath tubs. Make sure you always place them on a heat resistant surface.

Smoking – did you know that cigarettes can burn at temperatures of over 700 degrees.

- 50% of accidental fire deaths in Northern Ireland are caused by careless disposal of smoking materials.
- Take care smoking if you're drowsy, taking prescription drugs or if you have been drinking alcohol.
- Don't ever smoke in bed as you're bedding could easily catch fire.
- Always use proper ashtrays
- Make sure the cigarette is put out properly
- Keep matches and lighters out of reach of children.

Electric Blanket safety - Old or damaged electric blankets cause more than 5,000 fires a year. It is recommended that you get your blanket tested once a year; contact a qualified electrician about electric blanket testing or your local council for advice.

- Keep all electric blankets flat or roll loosely when storing away but never fold!
- Dispose of all electric blankets which are 10 years and over.
- Only leave a blanket switched on all night if it has a setting for safe all-night use, if not, always ensure it has been disconnected before getting into bed.
- Always fit an electric blanket as advised in the instructions as most of the faults occur due to people not fitting them properly .

- Look out for a third party certification mark on the blanket and packaging to ensure it meets the latest UK and European safety standards. An example to look for is BEAB approved.

DO NOT use hot water bottles in bed along with an electric blanket as this could cause electrocution.

Your skin also becomes thinner with age so if you use a hot water bottle on its own make sure it has a protective covering.

Staying Warm During Winter Months

1. Heat your home well by setting your heating to the right temperature (18-21°C). You can keep your home warm and still keep your bills as low as possible.
2. Get financial support. There are grants, benefits and sources of advice available to make your home more energy efficient, improve your heating or help with bills. It is worthwhile checking that you are claiming all the benefits you are entitled to.
3. Eat well. Food is a vital source of energy, which helps to keep your body warm. Try to make sure that you have hot meals and drinks regularly throughout the day.
4. Get a flu jab. You can get a free jab from your GP to protect against seasonal flu if you are over 65. Contact your GP for more information.
5. Look after yourself and others. On extremely cold days try to avoid going outside. If you do need to, remember to wrap up warm.

For further information on Home Safety or for a FREE Home Safety Check please contact your local Council's Home Safety Team.

Older Person's General Home Safety Leaflet



Falls

Falls continue to be the leading cause of accidental death in the home with the incidence of falling increasing as people get older. Many risk factors have been identified which can increase your risk of falling, however many of these risk factors can be addressed to reduce your risk of having a fall at home.

Steps you can take to help prevent a fall

Home environment

- Keep your stairs free of clutter – do not leave items lying on the stairs that could cause a trip or fall.
- Ensure your home is well lit (use high wattage low energy light bulbs) and always put lights on at night especially when getting up during the night.
- Remove all loose / worn mats.
- Avoid trailing leads/wires.
- If you use non-slip mats in the bath and shower ensure they are used appropriately removing them after use to air dry and cleaning the soap suds from them that can build up and cause a slip.
- Mop up any water/spillages as soon as possible.
- Have broken or uneven pathways outdoors repaired

Your home can be adapted with the help of aids in order to minimise your risk of falling. You can be referred to an Occupational Therapist who can have handrails fitted to your home. People find it most useful having handrails fitted at front or back doors, an additional handrail fitted on the stairs and by the toilet.

For more information contact your local Home Safety Officer at your local Council

Checking your eyesight - Good vision has a major role in how you maintain your balance. Have your eyesight checked by an optician every 2 years or sooner if under 70 and annually if 70 or over, or sooner if you notice a change. Eye tests are FREE for everyone over the age of 60.

Looking after your feet - As you get older, the size and shape of your feet may change so always have your feet measured when buying new shoes.

When choosing footwear remember to choose styles that have a back with a strap, velcro or preferably laces to secure them tightly. Avoid high heels and slip ons.

Ensure to attend podiatrist appointments if you are a diabetic as it is particularly important that you look after your feet.



Bone health - Osteoporosis is known as the silent illness and results in more fragile bones that will break more easily, often as a result of a fall. There are a number of risk factors that can increase your likelihood of developing osteoporosis such as; family history, smoking, drinking alcohol, long term immobility, early menopause, previously fractured bones and certain medical conditions. If you think you might be at risk of this condition you should contact your GP.

What can you do to help maintain healthy bones?

- Eat a balanced diet including foods rich in calcium and vitamin D. For example; milk, cheese, yoghurt, oily fish, fortified cereals and margarine.
- Partake in regular weight-bearing exercise.
- Stop smoking.

Exercise and Physical Activity - Activities that improve muscle strength in our legs, arms, back, shoulders and chest are particularly important as we get older. They can make it easier to get up out of a chair, and improve our posture, co-ordination and balance which reduces our risk of falling. Using the stairs frequently, rising to a standing position from a chair, walking, gardening, Tai Chi and dancing are great examples. Exercise must be performed at least twice a week for effective falls prevention.

For more information please contact the Falls Team to find in your local Trust about local classes and individual sessions.

Poisons

Many substances in the home are potential poisons including; medication, solvents, cleaning products, detergents, carbon monoxide, pesticides and perfumes.

Managing your medication

Speak to your doctor or pharmacist if you're having difficulty managing your medication as often they can organise your medication into a sealed blister pack. Using a pill dispenser or having a family member help with organising your medication can also be useful.

It is important that you always remember to take your medication as advised by your doctor.

Always read labels and warnings to ensure medications are not mixed up or mistakenly taken for something else. More than 1 in 10 older people have difficulty handling their medication and remembering when to take their medication. This could potentially lead to taking double doses and mixing medications which shouldn't be taken together.



Carbon Monoxide

A highly poisonous gas known as the 'Silent Killer' that can't be seen and has no smell, odour or taste. It can be released by any appliance or heating system that burns oil, gas, wood or solid fuel.

Symptoms and Carbon Monoxide poisoning:

Headaches	Breathlessness
Dizziness	Stomach pain
Nausea	Tiredness
Chest pain	Loss of consciousness

If your Carbon Monoxide alarm activates or you have symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning.

1. **T** - Turn off or extinguish the heating source/appliance (if safe to do so).
2. **A** - Air- ventilate your home by opening windows and doors. Stay outside in the fresh air.
3. **S** - Seek medical help if you feel unwell.
4. **K** - Keep all heating sources/appliances off until serviced (or chimney/flues cleaned) by a qualified professional.

It is very important that your carbon monoxide is situated in the correct place and you MUST follow manufacturer's guidelines.

Also be aware that the batteries in your alarm may be a replaceable type, which should be replaced every year, Some alarms have sealed batteries which are not replaceable. All carbon monoxide alarms have a limited working life, irrespective of the battery type. Typically this will be between 5-7 years from the time of installation and the whole unit should be replaced. It is useful to mark a date on your alarm when it will expire from the date of installation.

Remember to test all carbon monoxide alarms on a weekly basis!

To protect yourself from carbon monoxide poisoning all boilers and appliances MUST be serviced by a qualified engineer registered with the appropriate agency:



Gas Safe Register (gas)
www.gassaferegister.co.uk
Tel: 0800 408 5500



NIACS (all fuels)
Northern Ireland Association of Chimney Sweeps
www.niacs.co.uk



OFTEC (oil)
Oil Firing Technical Association
www.oftec.org
Tel: 0845 65 85 080



Northern Ireland Coal Advisory Service (solid fuel)
www.coaladvisoryservice.com
Tel: 0845 712 5300