

Partners in Quality Care - February 2009 -



The In-Home Aide's Role in Observing the Client's Home for Safety Hazards

What you will learn:

- Safety Hazards to watch for in a client's home
- The In-home aide's role in reporting safety hazards
- The In-home aide's role in client education regarding home safety hazards

As the weather is turning colder client's may rely more on heat sources such as electric heaters, kerosene heaters, and other heat sources and with this we are reminded of the risk of fires and/or burns if these types of appliances are not used properly. This is just one type of hazard that you can report to your supervisor that will help keep your client safe.

As an In-home aide you are a valuable member of the Home Care team in observing the client's home environment for possible safety hazards.

Conditions inside and outside the home—especially things that increase the risk of falls, such as poor lighting, narrow steps, and slippery surfaces—can be dangerous to older residents

As people grow older, they risk physical challenges that can make it difficult, and sometimes impossible to stay in their homes without some degree of change to their environment. **In fact, studies indicate that half of all falls happen at home and research suggests that one-third of home accidents can be prevented by easy home updates and preventative maintenance.**

Home Safety Tips for the Client:

- Clear walking areas
- Secure Area Rugs with doubled sided tape
- Keep Stairways well lit
- Repair any holes in carpeting
- Install Nonskid treads on stairs
- Use Night Lights
- Install handrails on both sides of steps, inside and out
- Use brighter bulbs in all settings
- Install nightlights in all areas of night activity
- Consider a Home Alert System and remind the client to keep it with them at all times





Hazards within the home place persons at greater risk for falls and injury. Not surprising, 95% of falls in older adults happen in and around the home, most in the bedroom or bathroom. For example, bathroom lighting is often inadequate, and the bathtub and toilet areas lack proper hand rails. In addition, unsecured scatter rugs and personal items placed close by for convenience often create a cluttered, dangerous pathway between the bedroom and bathroom, creating a high risk for falling, particularly at night.

Other examples of external environmental safety hazards include pets underfoot, piles of papers and personal belongings, uneven flooring or lack of home repairs, and extension cords that present mobility hazards in common walkways. Identifying such hazards and implementing an environmental modification plan can greatly reduce risk within the home.

What to look for in the bathroom: Is the floor clean and dry, are there secure railings in the bath and toileting area, is the toilet readily accessible with adequate lighting, are bathtubs and showers equipped with non-skid mats, abrasive strips, or surfaces that are not slippery.

Older adults with limited resources often use space heaters to heat the home and save money. This and other sources of heat that produce carbon monoxide can be quite dangerous. Ventilation within the home should be checked regularly, and the presence of carbon monoxide should be evaluated.

The In-home aide can help ensure a safe environment for the client by being observant to potential safety hazards and reporting any possible hazards to their supervisor as well as providing education to their clients. Also let your supervisor know if your patient has problems hearing or seeing!

The home should be carefully assessed for electrical and fire hazards. Many elders living in their own homes on fixed incomes cannot afford home repairs, placing them at risk for fire. A fire escape plan from every room in the home should be formulated and practiced by the adults living in the home, particularly clients with limited mobility. Working smoke detectors and fire extinguishers should be available in every home, and a plan should be devised for checking them regularly. If a fire extinguisher is available, the client should be taught to operate it.

Fire & Burn Safety Tips for the Client:

- Heat the Home Safely - keep portable heaters at least 3 feet away from people and objects. Never dry clothes on heaters.
- Avoid Smoking
- Install Smoke Detectors - have smoke detectors on every level of the home, test smoke detectors once a month
- Take Care with Electricity - Throw out or repair frayed or damaged electrical cords, never overload electrical outlets
- Unplug appliances when not in use
- Keep electrical appliances away from sink, tub and shower areas
- Use caution when using heating pads and electric blankets

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Kathie Smith, RN: Director of Quality Initiatives and State Liaison; Editor in Chief
Marie Epps: Communication Associate; Publication Designer