

## Fire Safety Tips for Older Adults

According to a report, *Fire Risks for Older Adults*, published by the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), older adults represent one of the highest fire risk populations in the United States. The following fire safety tips from the USFA can be used by older adults and building owners to enhance fire safety in living units.

### Before the Fire

Identify the nearest emergency exit. Whether you are at home or elsewhere, you should always know the location of the nearest exit. This could save your life in an emergency.

1. Heed fire Safety Guidelines:
  - Walkways and doorways should accommodate any mobility impairment an individual may have. For example, doorways should accommodate a wheelchair's width and flooring material should accommodate artificial limbs, walkers or canes.
2. Install smoke alarms:
  - The single most important step you can take is to install a smoke alarm that suits your needs. A working smoke alarm can make a vital difference in the event of a fire and may significantly reduce the risk of dying in a fire.
  - A properly functioning alarm can alert you to the presence of deadly smoke while there is still time to escape. Place alarms next to each sleeping area and on every floor of your home. Keep smoke alarms clean by vacuuming or having them vacuumed regularly. Test batteries monthly and replace them annually. Ask friends, family members, building managers or someone from the fire department to install and test the batteries of a smoke alarm if it is hard to reach. If your smoke alarms are hardwired (connected to the electric circuitry of your residence), make sure they are also equipped with battery back-ups.
3. Wheelchairs:
  - To accommodate wheelchair users in public buildings, manual alarm pull stations should be mounted no higher than 48-in (121-cm) from the floor. If manual alarms are mounted higher than 48 inches, these devices should be retrofitted with attachments that make them accessible to a wheelchair user.
4. Have a Fire Extinguisher and Learn How To Use It:
  - If you are confined to a wheelchair, consider mounting (or having someone mount) a small "personal use" fire extinguisher in an accessible place on your wheelchair and become familiar with its use.

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Then, if you cannot “stop, drop and roll” during a fire, you should “pull, aim, squeeze and sweep.”

5. Live near an exit:

- If you live in an apartment building, try to get an apartment on the ground floor. If this is not possible, know where the exit stairwell is and plan to wait there for help if you cannot take the stairs on your own in the event of a fire. If you live in a multistory house, try to sleep on the ground floor. Make sure a phone (or a TTY/TDD if you use one) is next to your bed, within arm’s reach. Keep emergency telephone numbers and hearing aids (if necessary) handy as well. If necessary, construct an exit ramp for emergency exits. It is recommended that ramps be at least 36 in (91 cm) wide. Guardrails and handrails should be 44 to 48 in (111 to 121 cm) high and 34 to 38 in (86 to 96 cm) wide.

6. Plan and practice escape plans:

- Knowing your escape plan is one of the most important steps you can take to save your life in a fire. Plan your escape around your capabilities. Know at least two exits from every room. Make sure you can unlock all your doors and windows. Be sure you know how to open your windows. If security devices, such as bars, are installed across the windows, ensure that they release from the inside. Make any necessary accommodations (such as installation of exit ramps) to facilitate escape.

7. Involved the fire department:

- Ask the fire department to help you plan an escape route and inform them of your special needs. Ask the fire department to help identify any fire hazards in your home and to explain how to correct them. Any areas you plan to use as a rescue area must be identified and agreed upon by you and officials from the fire department. Learn the fire department’s limitations and make fire officials aware of yours.

### **During a Fire**

1. Get out and stay out:

- Leave your home as soon as possible. Do not try to gather personal possessions or attempt to extinguish a fire. Do not use the elevator. Once out, do not go back inside.

2. Test the doors before opening them:

- Using the back of your hand, reach up high and touch the door, the doorknob and the space between the door and the frame. If anything feels hot, keep the door shut and use your second exit. If everything feels cool, open the door slowly and exit as low to the ground as possible if smoke is present.

3. Stay low and go:

- Crawl low and keep under the smoke, if you are physically able; if not, try to cover your mouth and nose to avoid breathing toxic fumes and make your way to safety as quickly as possible.

4. What to do if you’re trapped:

- Close all the doors between you and the fire. Fill cracks in doors and

cover all vents with damp cloth to keep smoke out. If possible, call the fire department and tell them where you are located. Signal rescuers from a window with a light-colored cloth.

5. Stop, drop and roll:

- If any part of you catches fire, do not run and do not try to extinguish the flames with your hands. Cover your face with your hands. Drop to the ground, rolling over and over. If you have a disability that prevents your taking these actions, try to keep a flame-resistant blanket or rug nearby to smother any flames.

### **Fire Prevention**

1. Cooking:

- Never leave the stove unattended while cooking. If you need to step away from the stove, turn it off. Wear tight-fitting clothing when cooking over an open flame and keep towels and potholders away from the flame. If food or grease catches fire, smother the flames by sliding a lid over the pan and turning off the heat. Do not try to use water to extinguish a grease fire. When deep-frying, never fill the pan more than one-third full of oil or fat. Make sure the stove is kept clean and free of grease buildup. Turn pot handles away from the front of the stove so they cannot be knocked off or pulled down. Never put foil or other metals in the microwave.

2. Electrical Safety:

- Electric blankets should conform to the appropriate standards and have overheating protection. Do not wash electric blankets repeatedly as this can damage their electrical circuitry. If an appliance begins to smell suspicious or emit smoke, unplug it immediately. Replace all frayed or broken electrical cords. Never use an appliance with exposed wires. Never overload extension cords and keep them out of traffic areas. Use only tested and (Underwriters Laboratories Inc)
- UL-listed electrical appliances.

3. Smoking

- Never smoke in bed. Make sure that you are alert when you smoke. If a gas stove or oxygen source is nearby, do not smoke. Place signs stating that oxygen is in use and warning visitors to refrain from smoking. Do not smoke while under the influence of alcohol or if you are taking prescription drugs that can cause drowsiness or confusion. Never leave smoking materials unattended and collect them in large, deep ashtrays. Soak the ashes in the ashtray before discarding them.

4. Space heaters:

- Provide space around space heaters. Keep heaters at least 3 ft (91 cm) from combustible materials. Follow the manufacturers' directions regarding operation, fueling and maintenance of your space heater. Do not use heaters or other heating devices near dry clothing.

5. Heating:

- Have your heating system and chimney checked and cleaned annually by a professional. Never store fuel for portable heating equipment in the

home. Keep fuel outside or in a detached storage area or shed.

6. Fireplaces:

- Open fireplaces can be hazardous; they should be covered with tempered glass doors and guarded by a raised hearth that is 9 to 18 in (22 cm to 45 cm) high.

The loss prevention information and advice presented in this brochure are intended only to advise our insureds and their managers of a variety of methods and strategies based on generally accepted safe practices, for controlling potentially loss producing situations commonly occurring in business premises and/or operations. They are not intended to warrant that all potential hazards or conditions have been evaluated or can be controlled. They are not intended as an offer to write insurance coverage for such conditions or exposures, or to simply that Great American Insurance Company will write such coverage. The liability of Great American Insurance Company is limited to the specific terms, limits and conditions of the insurance policies issued.  
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