

Valley Care Association

Home Safe Home

Self-Guided Home Safety Assessment

Valley Care Association

345 Maplewood Ave.
Ambridge, PA 15003

724-266-0408

www.valleycareassociation.org

The **Home Safe Home** safety workbook can help you make your home safer and more comfortable. As a room-by-room safety guide it will help you survey your home for fire hazards, security, and especially for fall risk. A regular home safety survey is important because:

- Some safety hazards can remain hidden for years.
- Even though you live there every day, it can be hard to notice the small but potentially devastating safety problems that can develop.
- While most of us are aware of fire and security safety issues, few know about the more deadly danger of fall-related accidents.

This workbook can help you find both the obvious and the more subtle home safety trouble spots in your home.

As we age, our bodies naturally change and, thus, how we interact in the home environment also changes. To reach for a high item on a shelf, or to just get into and out of the bathtub, takes a little more care and thought. It can be the same throughout the house.

Along with a safe home, we need to keep our bodies safe and strong through exercise and activity. Our brain, muscles, and bones are designed for physical use. When we don't maintain a strong body it will not be able to help prevent an injury. Keep in mind that it is usually those older adults who live an active physical and mental lifestyle who live long and satisfying lives. Discuss these issues with your doctor and ask for a balance test.

There may come a time that living in your current home cannot be safe for you. As we age, we all must consider and prepare for the time when it could be in our best interest to move to a more convenient and safer residence.

Let's start the tour of your home and see if there are improvements that will help you live in safety and comfort.

John Seitz – Home Safe Home Program Coordinator
Valley Care Association, 345 Maplewood Ave. Ambridge PA 15003
724-266-0408 **www.valleycareassociation.org**

While Valley Care Association has used due diligence in compiling this checklist, which is intended to make individuals more aware of some ways to make living at home safer and easier, neither they, nor the author assume any legal responsibility for the possible consequences of the use thereof.

Circle each answer yes or no. The no answers can be safety concerns that need to be corrected

Outside The Home And Its Entry Areas

Sidewalks & Steps:

- Are the outside walkway and steps even? YES NO**
- Is there a sturdy railing along all steps? YES NO**
- Are the walkways free from debris and vegetation?..... YES NO**
- Are all walkways free from standing water?..... YES NO**

Lighting:

- Do all entrances have lights? YES NO**
- Is there a light from the garage to the house? YES NO**
- Can you see to unlock the door? YES NO**
(Hint... For added security, install a "motion" light outside your door.)

Doors & Locks:

- Exterior door width is _____ and _____**
- Are all doors in good repair?..... YES NO**
- Can you see who is outside without opening the door? YES NO**

- Is there a dead-bolt lock on all outside doors?..... YES NO**
- Do the locks work smoothly?..... YES NO**
- Can you grasp the keys firmly?..... YES NO**
- Are there doorbells & do they work? YES NO**
(Hint...Door threshold height should be no more than 1/2" high)
(Hint...Doors with levers are easier to open than doors with knobs)

Windows:

- Can you open and close the windows easily? YES NO**
- Do all windows have locks? YES NO**
- Do your windows close tight with no drafts?..... YES NO**

Ease of entry:

- Is there a place other than the floor to place packages when opening the doors? YES NO**
- Is the mailbox within easy reach of the front door?..... YES NO**
- Can the doorbell be heard throughout the house?..... YES NO**
(Hint... Place a 24" high table next to the open side of the door.)

General:

- Do you keep the landscaping near the house trimmed and not overgrown ? YES NO**
- Is the garage and its doors in good condition? YES NO**
- Do you have house numbers that can be clearly seen from the street at night?..... YES NO**
(Hint... Use a wheeled garbage container.)
(Hint... Don't hide keys. Leave a set with a trusted neighbor.)
(Hint... Ask to see a photo ID from service and delivery people.)

KITCHEN

Smoke Detector:

Is there a smoke detector & is it in working condition? YES NO

Has the battery been changed within 6 months? YES NO

(Hint... Change batteries each time you change your clocks
to and from daylight-savings time.)

(Hint... Battery type smoke detectors should be replaced every 5 years)

Stove:

**Is the stove area kept clear of towels, curtains and
other flammable materials? YES NO**

Are temperature controls easy to turn and to read? YES NO

Are temperature controls in the front or back? Front is safe... Front Back

**Do you keep the stove, oven and ventilator
hood free of grease? YES NO**

**Do you always stay at the stove when cooking,
then turn off all controls? YES NO**

(Hint... Keep a box of baking soda on or near the stove to put out a
grease fire quickly.)

Sink:

Can faucet handles be turned off and on easily? YES NO

Is the sink area free of clutter? YES NO

Do you know how to use the main water valves? YES NO

Refrigerator:

Is the door seal tight? YES NO

(Hint... Use a dollar bill placed in the door to check the seal.
It should pull out with some resistance.)

(Hint... Throw out expired food. Also, date and tightly seal leftovers.)

Storage:

Are frequently-used items stored within easy reach? YES NO

Do cabinet doors and drawers have pull knobs? YES NO

Do stacked items contain no more than two items? YES NO

Are cleaning products stored away from food? YES NO

(Hint... Use a reach stick [grabbing tool] to reach a high item
or to pick up something from the floor.)

(Hint... Keep a step stool with a handrail in the kitchen.)

General:

Do you use slip resistant floor wax? YES NO

Do all throw rugs have a slip resistant backing? YES NO

Is there a handy mop? YES NO

(Hint... You may need a rolling cart to carry food between
preparation and serving areas.)

(Hint... Always unplug the toaster and appliances after use)

BATHROOMS

Doors:

Does the bathroom door lock have an emergency release? YES NO

Door width is _____ & swings in or out
(Hint... lever handles are easier to use than knobs.)

Bathtub & Shower:

Can you get into and out of the bathtub and shower without difficulty? YES NO

Does the bathtub/shower have sturdy grab bars? YES NO

Does the bathtub/shower floor have a slip resistant mat, abrasive strips, or non-slippery surface? YES NO

(Hint... Use liquid soap to avoid slippery soap falls.)

(Hint... Always place a slip resistant mat or abrasive strips into your tub and shower.)

(Hint... Many types of grab bars and tub/shower seats are available.)

(Hint... Most bathtubs and showers should have two grab bars. One placed vertically at the entrance and one mounted horizontally along the back wall.)

Toilet:

Can you get on and off the toilet easily? YES NO

Commode height is _____

(Hint... Wall handrails, a raised toilet seat, or a seat with handrails can be easily installed.)

Sink:

Is the hot water temperature set no higher than 120? YES NO

Are electrical appliances kept well away from all water sources (sink, shower, and bathtub)? YES NO

Is there good lighting at a well-organized medicine cabinet? ... YES NO

Is the bathroom mirror at the appropriate height? YES NO

(Hint... Make sure that expired medications and vitamins are thrown out.)

General:

Do you have a nightlight in the bathroom? YES NO

Do all throw rugs have a slip resistant backing? YES NO

Is there room for a caregiver to assist someone? YES NO

Remember that a large number of falls happen in the bathroom. Keep the floors dry and be careful.

BEDROOMS

Lighting:

- Is there a lighted path from the bedroom to the bathroom?..... YES NO**
Can a bedroom light be easily switched on from the door?YES NO
Can you reach a lamp or light switch from the bed?YES NO
(Hint... Keep a flashlight on your bedside table, especially when traveling.)
(Hint... Have at least one nightlight in the bedroom.)

Bed:

- Can you get in and out of the bed easily?..... YES NO**
Is the furniture in the room arranged for easy movement in the dark?..... YES NO
Are all fire sources such as ashtrays, cigarettes, and heaters kept well away from the bed? YES NO
(Hint... Never smoke in bed.)
(Hint... Never go to sleep with a space heater on, and unplug your electric blanket during the day.)

Telephone:

- Can you easily reach a phone from your bed?..... YES NO**
Do you keep important and emergency numbers near your phone?..... YES NO
(Hint... Use a phone with a lighted dial that also has speed dial.)

General:

- Is the closet organized so that clothing and other stored items are within easy reach? YES NO**
Is there a closet light with a switch that is easily reached..... YES NO
Is there a smoke alarm nearby in the hall? YES NO

Door width is _____

(Hint... Wear slip resistant low-heeled shoes and never walk around in stockings or just socks. Use snug-fitting rubber-bottomed slippers.)

STAIRS

- Are the stairs well lit?** YES NO
Are the treads bare?..... YES or Carpeted?
Are stair treads securely fastened?..... YES NO
Can you clearly see the edges of the steps? YES NO
Do you keep the stairs clear of clutter? YES NO
Are there secure handrails on both sides of all stairs? YES NO

(Hint... Pay particular attention to the cellar stairs.)

FURNITURE, CARPETS & RUGS

- Is your furniture arranged in an uncluttered way ?.....** YES NO
Is your furniture sturdy and in good repair?..... YES NO
Does your furniture have rounded edges?..... YES NO
Does the furniture height allow for easy sitting and standing?..... YES NO
Are the carpet edges tacked down?..... YES NO
Do you keep electrical cords from under the rugs?..... YES NO
Do throw rugs have rubber backings?..... YES NO
Are all living areas well lit with switches within easy reach? YES NO
Is the TV remote control within easy reach?..... YES NO
Is there a portable or cell phone handy?..... YES NO

(Hint... Consider a "lift-assisted chair" to help you get up and moving safely.)

(Hint... Avoid "shag style" very thick carpet and rugs. They are a tripping hazard.)

ELECTRICAL

- Are electrical cords in good condition?.....** YES NO
Are all cords kept clear of walkways?..... YES NO
Do your light switches work without sparks? YES NO

(Hint... Don't overload your outlets with more than 2 extension cords.)

(Hint... Ground Fault Interrupter (GFI) outlets installed in the kitchen, laundry and bath will detect an imbalance in the electrical circuit and shut off the current.)

BASEMENT

- Do you have your furnace checked each year? YES NO**
Does the hot water heater have any rust or signs of leaking?..... YES NO
Do you have a fuse box with extra fuses of the correct AMP size?
Or, Is the circuit box in good condition? YES NO
**Are paint and flammables kept in an airy location,
and in tight containers? YES NO**
Are all workspaces well-lighted and clear of clutter? YES NO
Are the washer & dryer in good condition? YES NO
The washer and dryer are on what level of the house? _____

Who does the laundry? _____

- Is there a safe place to fold and hang laundry? YES NO**
Do your cellar stairs have railings on both sides?..... YES NO
Do the cellar stairs have good lighting?..... YES NO

(Hint... Clean out the dryer lint trap with each use. Clean lint from the dryer vent pipe every other month or more.)

(Hint... Keep stored items away from the furnace and hot water heater.)

GENERAL SAFETY

- Do you have a fire emergency exit plan that you practice? YES NO**
Do you have a fire extinguisher on each level of your home? YES NO
Is the fire extinguisher "charge" up to date? YES NO
Are any space heaters carefully maintained and used? YES NO
Do you have a carbon monoxide alarm? YES NO

(Hint... Keep your emergency numbers handy at all telephones.)

(Hint... Remove doorsills higher than ½", or mark with safety tape.)

(Hint... Keep low-rise tables, footrests and plants away from pathways in your rooms.)

(Hint... Turn space heaters off when not in the room!)

(Hint... If you have gas heat, wood burning fireplace or an attached garage, consider installing a carbon monoxide detector.)

(Hint...Keep a well-charged cell phone with you during the day and at your bedside at night. Have it programmed to quickly call a family member and/or 911 in the event of an emergency.)

As you age, and, if you become frail, consider carefully the advantages of moving to a more convenient and safer home. Know when it's time to move and plan on where to live next.

PERSONAL SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

With age, there may be changes in vision, hearing, muscle strength, balance and reflexes. Medications may cause dizziness or lightheadedness, while osteoporosis and arthritis can severely decrease mobility.

These are some of the reasons why older adults have debilitating falls. Even minor falls can cause bones to break, leading to a long convalescence and possible loss of independence. Preventing falls is very important, not just in your home, but also by making your body a safer and stronger body. Our personal "house" is our own body. We need to be aware of its needs and keep it in the best possible condition.

STEPS TO TAKE FOR FALL PREVENTION

- 1. Mild weight-bearing activities, such as walking regularly, can slow the loss of bone mass due to osteoporosis, and will improve balance. Ask your doctor for a balance and gait test. Check with your doctor to plan an exercise program that will improve your strength and invigorate your days.*
- 2. Talk to your doctor and pharmacist about the side effects of the drugs you may be taking. They might affect your balance and coordination.*
- 3. Have your vision and hearing checked each year.*
- 4. Always keep at least one hand on a railing when going up and down stairs.*
- 5. Don't get up too quickly after eating, or resting. Low blood pressure can cause dizziness.*
- 6. Keep the nighttime temperature in your home at 65 or higher. Being too cold or too hot can make you dizzy.*
- 7. Drink lots of water, especially on hot days. Keep a water bottle on your nightstand.*
- 8. Wear low-heeled shoes that fully support your feet. Don't wear smooth-soled slippers or just socks*
- 9. If you get unsteady or dizzy, use a cane to help with balance. Use special care when walking outdoors on wet and icy walkways. It can be helpful to take a walking stick when traveling to unfamiliar places.*
- 10. Limit how much alcohol you drink. We all know how alcohol can affect balance and reflexes.*
- 11. Use common sense to work within your physical limits, while striving to improve your physical condition.*

Home Safe Home is always available to help you find the adaptive safety devices and home repairs that will help you live safely in your home. Call 724-266-0408 weekdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. We service the greater Sewickley Valley, from the I-79 Corridor west to the Allegheny County line, then throughout all of Beaver County.

For general information and help in locating services for older adults, call your county office on aging.

Allegheny County Area Agency on Aging - 412-350-5460

Beaver County Office on Aging - 724-728-7707

Westmoreland - 724-830-4444

Butler - 1-888-367-2434

Washington – 1-800-342-8980

Armstrong - 1-800-368-1066

Lawrence - 724-658-3729

Fayette – 1-800-342-8980

ADAPTIVE SAFETY DEVICES

Your local hardware store (TrueValue, Home Depot, Lowe's, etc.) will be helpful. Look under “Medical Equipment and Supplies” in the Yellow Pages.

Two mail-order catalogs with a large selection of home aids for older adults are:

- **Dr. Leonards, 1-800-785-0880 www.drleonards.com**
- **Maxi Aids, 1- 631-752-0521 www.maxiaids.com**

ALSO:

- **Consider the purchase or rental of a home emergency response system.**
- **Carry a cell phone with you for emergency use.**
- **Sign up for the Carrier Alert Program at your post office.**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For home safety information, go to: www.homesafetycouncil.org

Visit the Valley Care Association website:

www.valleycareassociation.org

Read the free monthly newspaper especially for older adults:

THE PITTSBURGH SENIOR NEWS or THE BEAVER COUNTY SENIOR NEWS

Call 412-367-2522 to find a location to pick up the paper.

Check with your health insurance carrier for wellness and exercise programs. Many are free and may be located near where you live.

This workbook was developed by: Valley Care Association

400 Broad St. Suite 203

Sewickley, PA 15143

412-749-5257

John Seitz – HOME SAFE HOME Program Coordinator & Workbook Author

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FALL

After you fall, panic can be your first reaction. However, how you react after a fall could actually cause more injuries than the fall itself!

- ***Take a few deep breaths to calm yourself.***
- ***Are you hurt, can you move?***
- ***Take your time and move slowly.***
- ***If you can't get up, ASK for help.***
- ***If you are alone, crawl SLOWLY to the phone.***
- ***If you fall on your back, roll onto your side and then onto your stomach.***
- ***If you can, crawl to a strong piece of furniture or doorknob and pull yourself up.***
- ***Call someone who lives nearby or call 911.***

Remember: Keep calm and you will be more likely to minimize your injury and get help quickly.