

Personal Safety

A Guide for Seniors

Electricity & Natural Gas in Your Home

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Why Think About Safety?



Everyone knows that a balanced diet and regular exercise can help keep you fit. But did you know that simple acts of safety are just as important for your health? Most injuries don't happen by chance or "accident." They can be avoided if you stay alert and practice good safety habits.

This Booklet Will Help

This booklet shows you how to use electricity and natural gas safely and efficiently, and how to avoid common safety hazards in many areas of your life.

Test Your Safety Sense

Are the following statements true or false?

1. You can't be shocked by an electrical appliance if it's turned off. (p.3) **T F**
2. If you smell gas you should look for the source with a lighted match. (p.3) **T F**
3. Ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) protect you from serious shock. (p.3) **T F**
4. It's best to test your smoke alarms once a year. (p.4) **T F**
5. Falls are rarely a cause of fatal injury. (p.5) **T F**
6. Utility workers and service people are required to show you identification if you ask. (p.6) **T F**
7. It's possible to conserve energy without compromising your health and comfort. (p.7) **T F**

Turn to the back cover for the answers. Explanations are on the pages listed. If you missed even one, your safety skills have room for improvement.



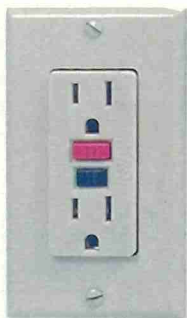
Taking time to recognize and correct safety hazards will help you prevent injuries.



Electricity & Natural Gas

Electrical Safety

- ▶ Use outlets with ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) in bathrooms, garages, near kitchen sinks, and outdoors. These devices prevent serious shock. They can be added as temporary adapters.
- ▶ Keep appliances away from water. Always unplug an appliance before cleaning. Even if turned off, it can shock.
- ▶ Never overload an outlet with multiple appliances.
- ▶ Use appliances approved by a nationally recognized testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories.
- ▶ Put safety covers on all electrical outlets, especially those within reach of children who visit you.



Call 811 before any digging projects so underground utility lines can be located and marked.



Natural Gas Safety

- ▶ Never use a candle or match to look for a gas leak. You could cause an explosion.
- ▶ If you smell gas and can't find the source immediately, get everyone out of the house. Call the gas company from a neighbor's or pay phone.
- ▶ At the start of each heating season, have a qualified contractor service your gas heater.

Gas Pipeline Safety

Leaks from natural gas pipelines, although rare, can be a fire hazard. It is important to know how to recognize them and what to do in case one occurs in your community.

Recognizing Pipeline Leaks

- ▶ A sulfur-like odor
- ▶ A hissing or roaring sound
- ▶ Dirt spraying or blowing into the air
- ▶ Continual bubbling in water
- ▶ Grass or plants dead or dying for no apparent reason

What to Do

- ▶ Do not use matches, cell phones, flashlights, or lighters, as even a tiny spark could ignite the gas.
- ▶ Go far away from the area until safety officials say it is safe.
- ▶ Report the leak to 911 and your local natural gas utility.



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Fire Smart, Fire Safe

Prevention Checklist

- ▶ Keep flammable objects away from heat sources like light bulbs and toasters.
- ▶ Be careful not to wear loose clothing and sleeves while cooking—fabric can catch fire.
- ▶ Turn off heating and cooking appliances before leaving home.
- ▶ Have worn or frayed appliance cords or plugs repaired by a licensed electrician.
- ▶ Never smoke in bed or when drowsy; never empty ashtrays into a wastebasket.
- ▶ Install at least one smoke detector on each floor of your home near bedrooms, and test monthly.
- ▶ Keep a multipurpose fire extinguisher on each level of your home—and learn how to use it.

If Fire Breaks Out

Call the fire department first. Keep emergency numbers by the phone. If the fire is small, use a multipurpose fire extinguisher. Never use water on an electrical fire. If you doubt you can put it out, leave and take everyone with you. If your clothes catch fire, stop, drop to the floor, and roll around until flames are extinguished.



**Check smoke alarms
and hold fire drills
frequently to help
protect yourself
against fire.**

Prevent Slips, Trips, and Falls

Surprisingly, falls are one of the most common causes of fatal injury for people of all ages—second only to motor vehicle crashes. Fortunately, they're also easily prevented.

Reach Safely

When you need to reach overhead, use a sturdy step stool or stepladder with a handrail. If you use a straight ladder, follow the 4-to-1 rule: place the ladder base 1 foot away from the object it leans on for every 4 feet of height to the ladder's resting point.

Light the Way

Have adequate lighting—and accessible light switches—in your basement, attic, garage, outdoors, and at the tops and bottoms of stairs. Keeping a flashlight near your bed can be handy at night. And motion-sensitive outdoor lights can improve your safety and save energy, too.



Secure Your Rugs

- ▶ Put nonslip mats in baths and showers.
- ▶ Keep throw rugs away from stair landings.
- ▶ Apply double-faced adhesive carpet tape or rubber matting to the backs of rugs and runners.



Protect yourself against slips, trips, and falls with good lighting.



Protect Yourself Against Crime

It's the obvious but overlooked things that can lead to home break-ins. Your best defense is thoughtful preparation. Start with these three tips. Your local police can provide additional safety advice.



6

Prevent Break-ins

- ▶ Lock doors (with deadbolt locks) and windows when you're home and check them when you leave the house.
- ▶ Have a neighbor collect your newspaper and mail when you're away.
- ▶ Leave on indoor and outdoor lights if you'll return after dark.

Prevent Utility Fraud

Never allow a stranger into your home, especially if you're not expecting anyone. Use a peephole to screen callers. Ask for identification from utility workers and other service people before you open the door. Don't be shy about asking—if they are legitimate they won't mind. Report suspicious people or activities to police.

Prevent Assaults

Don't walk alone in unfamiliar or dangerous areas. Carry your purse or briefcase securely under your arm, and your wallet in an inside pocket. Whenever possible, walk in well-lit areas and avoid side streets and alleys.



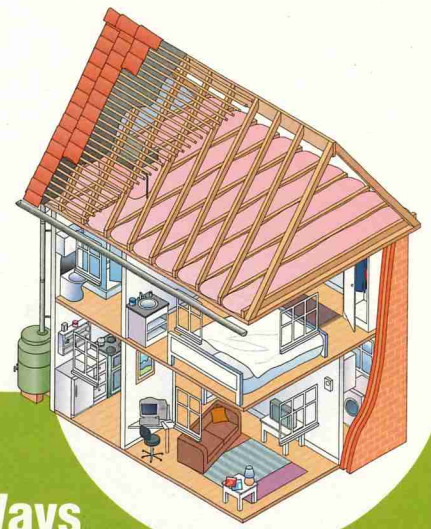
Preparation and caution can improve your personal security.

Conserve Energy, Preserve Your Comfort

You don't have to compromise your health or comfort to conserve energy and save money on your energy bills. You just have to use energy more efficiently.

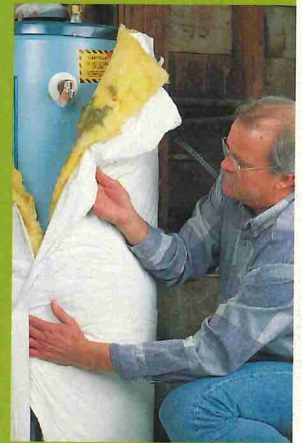


**Contact your utility
for tips on how
to stay comfortable
while conserving
energy and
saving money.**



Easy Ways to Save

- ▶ Turn off lights, TV, and appliances when you're not using them.
- ▶ Caulk and weather-strip around windows and doors.
- ▶ Wrap heating and cooling ducts with special tape.
- ▶ Put an insulating blanket around your water heater if manufacturer instructions call for it.
- ▶ Install energy-saving low-flow shower heads and faucets.
- ▶ Buy energy-efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs when incandescents burn out.
- ▶ Check with your utility about no-cost or low-cost energy conservation programs for seniors.



When the lights go out...



You can stay comfortable during a power outage by being prepared. Keep these items handy:

- ✓ Matches & candles
- ✓ Flashlight
- ✓ Battery-powered radio
- ✓ Extra batteries
- ✓ Bottled water
- ✓ Canned & dried foods
- ✓ Blankets
- ✓ Thermos
- ✓ Manual can opener
- ✓ First aid supplies

If You Have Questions About Your Bill



- ▶ Please contact your electric or gas utility if a billing problem arises or you disagree with a bill.
- ▶ If they don't resolve the problem to your satisfaction, you can contact the agency that regulates utilities in your state.
- ▶ If a payment problem arises for you, please contact your utility. Never put your health at risk.

Special Programs

Ask your electric or gas utility about special programs for seniors. For example, they may have low-cost or no-cost energy conservation services, or special rates.

Answers to Page 2 Quiz

1. F (p.3) 2. F (p.3) 3. T (p.3)
4. F (p.4) 5. F (p.5) 6. T (p.6) 7. T (p.7)