

Alzheimer's Home Safety Checklist

Q: Are there tips to make a home safe for people with Alzheimer's?

A: Yes. If you're providing in-home care for a person with Alzheimer's disease, the National Institute on Aging has created a 44 page booklet with a checklist to make each room in your home a safer environment..

Alzheimer's progresses differently in each person, but here are some general principles that may be helpful.

1. **Think prevention.** It is very difficult to predict what a person with Alzheimer's might do. Even with the best-laid plans, accidents can happen. Therefore, checking the safety of your home will help you take control of some of the potential problems that may create hazardous situations.
2. **Adapt the environment.** It is easier to change the home environment than to change some behaviors. You can decrease any hazards and stressors that accompany these behavioral and functional changes.
3. **Minimize danger.** A safe environment can be a less restrictive environment where the person with Alzheimer's disease can experience increased security and more mobility.

Your first question may be: Is it safe to leave a person with Alzheimer's alone? This issue needs individual evaluation: Does the person with Alzheimer's become confused or unpredictable under stress? Do they recognize a dangerous situation, like a fire? Do they know how to use the telephone in an emergency? Do they wander or become disoriented? Do they become agitated, depressed, or withdrawn when left alone for any period of time? Talk this over with your doctor or other health care professional to assist you as the symptoms of the disease changes.

Do a safety check of every room in your home. You may want to set aside a special area for yourself that is off-limits to anyone else and arrange it exactly as you like. A safe home can be less stressful for the person with Alzheimer's and for you. Enlist the help of your local Alzheimer's Association for suggestions. Here are some general tips:

- Display emergency numbers and your home address near all telephones.
- Use an answering machine when you can't answer phone calls. Turn ringers on low to avoid distraction and confusion. Put all portable and cell phones and equipment in a safe place so they will not be easily lost.
- Install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors in the kitchen and sleeping areas.
- Install secure locks on all outside doors and windows.
- Hide a spare house key outside in case the person with Alzheimer's disease locks you out of the house.
- Avoid the use of extension cords, and tack them to baseboards to avoid tripping.
- Install one handrail on stairways that extends beyond the first and last steps. Use carpets or safety grip strips on stairs. Put a gate across the stairs if the person has balance problems.
- Keep medications (prescription and over-the-counter) locked. Label each bottle of prescriptions with the person's name, name of the drug, drug strength, dosage frequency, and expiration date. Keep alcohol in a locked cabinet.
- Avoid clutter, throw out or recycle newspapers and magazines regularly. Keep all areas where people walk free of furniture. Keep plastic bags out of reach to prevent choking or suffocation.
- Remove all guns and other weapons from the home or lock them up. Install safety locks on guns or remove ammunition and firing pins.
- Lock all power tools and machinery in the garage, workroom, or basement.

For a room-by-room list of more Alzheimer's home safety tips from the National Institute on Aging, go to:

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/home-safety-people-alzheimers-disease/home-safety-room-room>