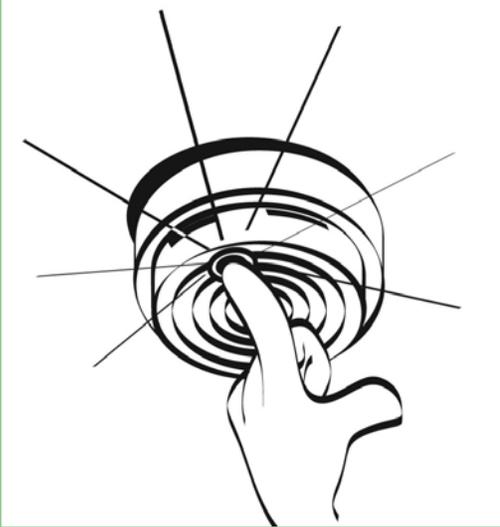


Caregiver's Guide to Fire Safety:

A Resource for Caregivers of People with Alzheimer Disease or Related Dementia



Alzheimer Disease is a progressive, degenerative brain disease that destroys vital brain cells. As a result of the changes to the brain, it no longer works as it used to. People with this disease become less and less able to make sense of information from the outside world. They become unable to think, remember, understand, and make decisions as before. If a fire were to occur in their home, people with Alzheimer Disease or other dementia would be extremely vulnerable to serious injury, or even death. This fact sheet provides caregivers with important fire safety information that can help them to provide a safer environment for persons with Alzheimer Disease - and those who live with them.

Prevent fire before it starts. . .

SMOKING

Careless smoking is the leading cause of fire deaths in Ontario. For people with Alzheimer Disease, the risk is even greater. As the disease progresses, they are less likely to follow safe smoking procedures, such as extinguishing cigarettes. Caregivers may be able to discourage smoking by removing visible reminders, such as cigarettes, matches, lighters and ashtrays. With these articles out of sight, the person with Alzheimer Disease may forget about smoking. It is important to supervise an individual with Alzheimer Disease while they are smoking. Purchase large, deep ashtrays and consider putting water in the bottom for added safety. Cigarette butts and ashes should be submerged in water before being dumped in the garbage. Placing a cookie sheet under the ashtray can prevent cigarette and its hot ashes from falling onto furniture or clothing. Smoking outside, or while seated at a table, is safer than smoking on upholstered sofas or chairs. *No one* should ever smoke in bed, nor in a home where oxygen is in use.

COOKING

If the person with Alzheimer Disease likes to cook, it is important to provide supervision and assist where necessary. Make sure he or she wears tight-fitting sleeves that cannot come in contact with a hot burner. Keep all combustible materials a safe distance from the stove, including paper towels, utensils, recipes or tea towels. Removing the fuses or knobs from the stove will prevent its use during unsupervised times. Other appliances, such as toasters and electric kettles, should be unplugged and stored out of sight when not in use. While microwave ovens present less hazards than stovetops, they can still cause fires and burn injuries. The use of microwave ovens by people with Alzheimer Disease should be supervised at all times.

HEATING APPLIANCES

If space heaters are used in the home, make sure they are kept at least one metre (three feet) away from anything that can burn, such as furniture, curtains, paper or people. The

surfaces of woodstoves and fireplaces get extremely hot, so keep metal fire screens around them to prevent contact burns.

CANDLES

The use of candles has increased dramatically over the past several years and so has the number of candle-related fires. All candled should be removed from the home of a person with Alzheimer Disease or related dementia. Candles can be easily knocked over or brushed against, so if they do exist, make sure they are placed out of reach and enclosed in glass containers. Also, after lighting candles, store the matches or lighters out of sight. Remember to extinguish all candles before leaving the room or going to bed.

BURN INJURIES

Scalds are painful injuries that can be prevented by adjusting the temperature of water heaters to 54C (130F). If a burn injury does occur, run cool water over the affected area for three to five minutes then seek medical attention, if necessary.

Install Smoke Alarms: It's the Law!



ONE ON EVERY LEVEL

If a fire occurs in the home, caregivers need as much time as possible to assist the person with Alzheimer Disease to safety. By law, all Ontario homes are required to have a working smoke alarm on every storey as well as outside all sleeping areas. Having working smoke alarms help to ensure the earliest detection and warning of fire. Test smoke alarms once a month following the manufacturers instructions and replace batteries once a year. If alarms are more than 10 years old, replace them with new ones.



SMOKE ALARM FEATURES

Smoke alarms are available with many different features that enhance their effectiveness. Alarms with a "hush" or "pause" feature are highly recommended as they permit the alarm to be temporarily silenced if it is activated

accidentally. The alarm will automatically re-set itself after a few minutes. Smoke alarms are also available with long-life lithium batteries that last up to 10 years. For more information on smoke alarm installation, maintenance or features, contact your local fire department.

Develop a Home Fire Escape Plan

Home Fire Escape Planning

In a fire situation, it is critical that everyone in the household knows what to do and where to go. Develop a home escape plan, indicating two ways out of every room, if possible, and review the plan with every member of the household - including the person with Alzheimer Disease. The plan should identify who will assist the person with Alzheimer Disease—and any other vulnerable occupant—to safely get out of the home.

Meeting Place

Include a meeting place outside the home, such as a tree, mailbox or neighbour's house, where everyone can meet and be accounted for.

Neighbour Assistance

If appropriate, it is a good idea to inform neighbours that someone with Alzheimer Disease is living next door and that in case of emergency they should call 9-1-1. Develop a 'buddy system' with your neighbours to assist in case of emergency or when you are away from the home.

Tripping Hazards

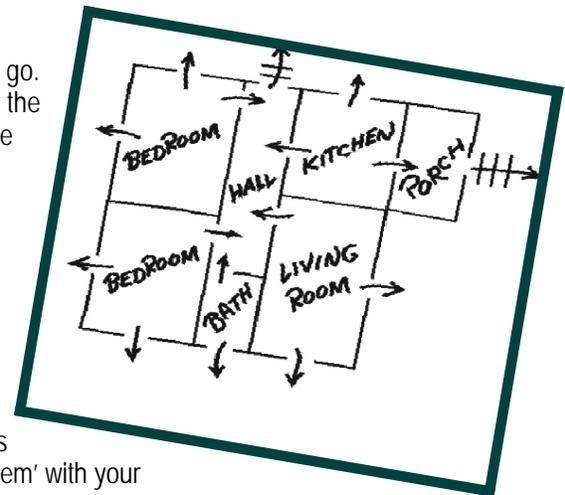
Tripping could be fatal in a fire situation. Check to see that all tripping hazards, such as scatter rugs, cords, shoes and general clutter, are removed from floors and stairways. Repair patios or walkways where there are uneven surfaces. Mark the edges of steps with reflective or a contrasting colour of tape, so they stand out and can be seen from a distance.

Ensure the home is adequately lit. Dimly lit areas may produce confusing shadows or create difficulty in recognizing everyday objects. Use night-lights to light the way from the bathroom to the bedroom.

- Remember: when the smoke alarm sounds and there is smoke or fire, everyone must get out right away and call the fire department from a cell phone or neighbour's house.

- For more information about fire safety, contact your local fire department or the Office of the Fire Marshal at: www.ofm.gov.on.ca.

For additional tips, education and support on Alzheimer Disease, contact your local Alzheimer Disease Society or visit www.alzheimerontario.org to find the one closest to you.



This fact sheet was produced by:



The Office of the
Fire Marshal



Alzheimer Society
ONTARIO

With special thanks to:

Alzheimer Society
HALDIMAND NORFOLK

