

# Home safety checker

Staying safe around  
the house

Home  
& care



# Information and advice you need to help you love later life.

**We're Age UK and our goal is to enable older people across the UK to love later life.**

We are passionate about affirming that your later years can be fulfilling years. Whether you're enjoying your later life or going through tough times, we're here to help you make the best of your life.

**Our network includes Age Cymru, Age NI, Age Scotland, Age International and more than 160 local partners.**

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# Introduction

It's important that we feel safe in our homes, yet more accidents happen at home than anywhere else. This leaflet contains checklists that will help you identify and resolve any possible safety risks, and help prevent accidents.

Throughout this leaflet you will find suggestions for organisations that can give further information and advice about your options. Their contact details can be found in the 'Useful organisations' section (see pages 16–18). Contact details for local organisations can usually be found in your local phone book. If you have difficulty finding them, your local Age UK should be able to help (see page 16).

As far as possible, the information given in this guide is applicable across the UK.

# General safety check around the home

Here are a few general safety checks and some tips on how to make sure that your home is safe.

## **Are your floors clear of trailing flexes?**

To avoid tripping over cords or wires, coil them up or tape them close to the wall. If you can, organise your appliances so that they are close to a socket.

## **Are you careful not to overload sockets?**

Overloaded sockets can be a fire hazard. If you don't have enough sockets, use a bar adapter on a lead, rather than a block adapter. But for appliances that use a lot of power, like a fridge or washing machine, only fit one plug in each socket.

## **Can you walk through your rooms without having to walk around furniture?**

Arrange your furniture to help you to move around your home more easily.

## **Do you keep your home free from clutter?**

Items lying around the home or on the stairs can be a trip hazard. Fire can also spread quickly if you have lots of newspapers and magazines lying around.

## **Do you have good lighting?**

Good lighting is particularly important on the stairs. Make sure that your light bulbs are bright and look for ones that come on straight away.

## **Do you have worn out or fraying carpets?**

Replace them or use double-sided carpet tape to help prevent them slipping. Loose rugs and mats can be a trip hazard and should be avoided if possible.

### **Do you use a step ladder to change light bulbs?**

Step ladders give stability and safety when you are changing a light bulb or reaching for something high up. Never use a ladder when you're on your own. The Age UK Group offers handyman schemes to older people in some areas who meet certain criteria, to assist with small repairs in the home. Contact Age UK Advice (see page 16) to find out what help is available in your area.

- i** In Wales, contact your local Age Cymru to find out if there's a handyman or HandyVan scheme in your area (see page 16). In Scotland, contact Care and Repair Scotland (see page 17).

### **Can you call for help if you fall or feel unsafe?**

A personal alarm lets you contact a 24-hour response centre at the touch of a button. Many councils run personal alarm schemes, contact them to find out more. Age UK also provides personal alarms\*. For more information about Age UK Personal Alarms and the likely costs, call 0800 707

- i** 6369. In Northern Ireland, the Age NI Personal Alarm\*\* service is available, call 0808 100 4545 for more information.

### **Keep an easy-to-read list of emergency phone numbers beside each phone.**

List details of important contacts, close friends, relatives and anyone else you think may be useful.

### **Do you have a letterbox cage?**

This can save you having to stoop to pick up your post. It can also stop papers being spread across the floor, which could cause you to slip.

### **Do your slippers fit properly?**

Worn out or badly fitting slippers can increase your risk of falling. Be careful when wearing any long, loose-fitting clothing in case you trip, particularly when climbing the stairs.

## **Organise a yearly gas appliances check.**

A yearly check can ensure that your appliances are working safely. Make sure that the check and any repairs are done by a Gas Safe-registered engineer (see page 17). If you're a tenant, your landlord is legally required to arrange a safety check, at least once a year, for the gas appliances they have provided. If you're an owner occupier, you may qualify for a free, annual safety check from your energy supplier, but you will have to register on their Priority Service Register. Ask your supplier for details.

## **Do you have a carbon-monoxide detector?**

Carbon monoxide is known as a 'silent killer' because you can't see, taste or smell it. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning can be similar to cold, flu or food-poisoning – headache, feeling sick, sore throat and dry cough. Heaters that burn gas, coal, oil or wood can give off carbon monoxide if they are not working properly. Look for a detector bearing the kitemark and European Standard number BS EN 50291. If you are worried about carbon monoxide, call the National Grid Gas Emergency Number on 0800 111 999.

## **When opening the door to a caller, do you lock, stop, chain and check?**

Put the chain on and ask for ID. If in doubt, keep them out. If you are suspicious of a caller, dial 999 and ask for the police. Only chain your front door when you are planning to open it. Keeping a chain on all the time may prevent services from entering in an emergency.

\*Age UK Personal Alarms is a product name of and provided by Aid-Call Ltd, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Age UK (registered charity number 1128267) and donates its net profits to Age UK. Aid-Call Ltd is registered in England and Wales number 01488490. Registered address: Tavis House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9NA.

\*\*Age NI (registered charity no. XT14600) benefits from the sale of Age NI Personal Alarms. Age NI Personal Alarms is a product name of Age NI Enterprises Ltd and Aid Call Limited. Age NI Enterprises Ltd acts as the agent on behalf of Aid-Call Ltd for the rental of Age NI Personal Alarms. Installation is provided directly by Age NI Enterprises Ltd. Age NI Enterprises Ltd is a joint venture trading company registered in Northern Ireland and owned by Age NI and Age UK Enterprises Ltd. Registered company number NI037064. Registered office: 3 Lower Crescent, Belfast BT7 1NR.

# Safety in the kitchen

## **Is there clear counter space around or near the cooker?**

This will allow you to put hot pots and pans down safely.

## **Put the things you use every day within easy reach.**

Rearrange your shelves and cupboards so that the things you use most often can be reached easily, or use long-handled 'grabbers' to avoid stretching.

## **Try a cordless kettle.**

They reduce the risk of accidentally scalding yourself by catching the cord. Look for a low capacity kettle which will be lighter to lift when full.

## **Turn pan handles away from the front of the cooker.**

Face pan handles towards the sides of your cooker to stop them being knocked over, and keep them away from the other heat rings.

## **Use a timer to remind yourself when food is ready.**

Always set a timer so you don't forget about your cooking. Some microwaves have timers that can be used independently of the oven. Never leave hot oil unattended as it is a fire risk.

## **Is there a risk that you could slip on wet flooring?**

Try to clean up any spills straight away. Non-slip matting can help reduce the risk of slipping.

## **Keep flammable items away from the hob.**

Make sure that tea towels, kitchen roll, oven gloves and paper bags are kept away from the cooker.

**Keep your kitchen equipment as clean as possible.**

A build-up of crumbs or grease, for instance, could be a fire risk.

**Do you know what to do if a pan catches fire?**

Don't move the pan or throw water on it. Turn off the heat, if it is safe to do so. Do not try to put the fire out yourself using a wet tea towel, as you risk injuring yourself. Leave the kitchen, close the door and shout to anyone else in the house to leave. Call 999.

**If you have a gas boiler with a pilot light, regularly check that the pilot light is burning.**

If it has gone out, there should be instructions on the boiler on how to relight it. If you cannot do it yourself, call a heating engineer out. Make sure your engineer is Gas Safe-registered.

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***Always set a timer so you don't forget about your cooking.***

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# *Safety on the stairs*

## **Are your stairs free from clutter?**

Avoid storing things on the stairs, even temporarily.

## **Do you have solid handrails, preferably on both sides?**

You should have handrails on all staircases, even on small flights.

## **Do you have a two-way light switch?**

This means a light switch at the top and bottom of the stairs. You should contact an electrician to fit one if you don't.

## **Can you easily see the edges of each step?**

Marking the edge of each step with paint or non-slip masking tape will make them more visible. Make sure that the tape doesn't become a trip hazard.

## **Do you have plug-in night lights?**

These turn on automatically at night time and provide a low light that can help you see your way to the bathroom or on the stairs if you get up at night.

## **Do you have emergency power-failure lights?**

These lights plug in to power sockets and remain lit if there is a power failure. This means that if the mains power fails after dark, you will still be able to find your way around. Keep a torch on hand to use during a power failure, too.

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*Plug-in night lights turn on automatically after dark and provide a low light that can help you see your way to the bathroom or on the stairs if you get up at night.*

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# Safety in the bathroom

## **Do you have a hand rail, non-slip bath mat and bath seat?**

These can help you to keep your balance when getting in and out of the bath. Make sure your bath mat is secure and doesn't slide – get a non-slip rubber mat or use self-stick strips. If you're having new flooring fitted, make sure it's non-slip. If you find it difficult getting in and out of the bath safely, contact the occupational therapy department of your local social services for an assessment. If you need help fitting a hand rail, or with other small home adaptations, see if there's a Handy person scheme in your area (see page 18).

## **Are your medicines stored in the bottle they came in, in a safe place, out of reach of children and pets?**

The label will have information about what the medicine is and how often to take it. It will also have the phone number of the pharmacy so that you can call if you have any questions. Clear out your medicines regularly and ask your local chemist to dispose of out-of-date or unwanted medications for you.

## **Are your mains-powered electrical appliances kept out of the bathroom?**

Appliances like hairdryers, heaters (unless fitted with a cord pull) and mains-powered radios should never be used in the bathroom.

Contact your local council to see whether it can provide you with bathroom safety equipment or financial help towards the cost. Our free guide *Adapting your home* and free factsheet *Funding repairs, improvements and adaptations* have more information.

# Safety in the bedroom

## **Do your sheets and bed covers trail on the floor?**

Tuck them out of the way so they don't trip you up when you're moving around.

## **Do you have an electric blanket?**

Get your electric blanket tested by an expert at least every three years, and replace it every ten years. Check for danger signs, such as frayed fabric and scorch marks. Check whether you have the type of blanket that can be left on overnight – if not, always unplug it when you go to bed. Never switch it on if it's damp or wet, and never use it with a hot-water bottle.

## **Keep a lamp or torch beside your bed.**

This can help if you need to get up in the night. A touch-sensitive bedside lamp avoids you having to search for light switches in the dark, and a torch can be helpful if there is a power failure.

## **Keep a phone close to your bedside.**

This is useful if you need to contact someone quickly during the night. Keep an easy-to-read list of emergency phone numbers next to the phone.

# Safety in the garden

## **Are your paths clear of leaves and overgrowing plants?**

Keep your garden tidy and free of obstacles and check for cracked or loose paving stones.

## **Are your paving stones free from moss and algae?**

Moss and algae become very slippery when wet. Prevent them growing by pruning overhanging branches to improve the light and air circulation. You can clear them using a power washer. Keep your gutters clear and clean as leaking gutters can cause moss and algae to form on paths, and lead to ice during the winter.

## **Do you take extra care if you have to go out in icy weather?**

Spread salt or sand on your steps if you need to go outside. Some councils offer a free bag of salt or sand to every household each winter, but you may need to collect it. Shoes and boots with good grip will also help you to walk confidently in icy conditions. Consider buying ice grippers to wear over your footwear.

## **If you use a ladder, is it at a safe angle and anchored at its base?**

Never use a ladder when you are on your own; it is far safer to have someone with you who can hold the ladder steady.

## **Do you lock tools away once you have finished using them?**

Always use tools carefully and place them in a safe position when you put them down. Locking them away in a small shed where they're out of sight and out of reach is ideal.

**Do you use a power point fitted with a residual current device (RCD) when using power tools and electric mowers?**

An RCD will shut off the power if an electrical fault develops or if you accidentally cut through the flex.

**Do you store weed killer safely?**

Prevent accidental poisoning by carefully following the instructions when using weed killers. Never transfer them to a different bottle as this could cause confusion.

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***Shoes and boots with good grip will help you to walk confidently in icy conditions. Consider buying ice grippers to wear over your footwear.***

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# Fire safety

## **Do you smoke?**

If so, use deep ashtrays and stub each cigarette out properly. Never smoke in bed.

## **Do you have a smoke alarm on each floor?**

It is vital to have one bearing the British Standard number BS 5446 and the kitemark. Test it monthly and keep it free from dust. Change the battery at least once a year. There are also special smoke alarms for people with hearing difficulties – contact Action on Hearing Loss (see page 16) to find out more.

## **Have you planned a fire escape route?**

Preparing and planning an escape route can save valuable time in a fire. If you live in a flat, make sure corridors and stairs are free from clutter. If there is an alternative escape route, check you know how to use it.

## **Have you planned a Home Fire Risk Check?**

Some fire and rescue services offer a Home Fire Risk Check where they can help you install smoke alarms, plan escape routes and assess other hazards. Contact your local authority (council) to find out how to register for a check.

## **If you have an open fire, do you use a fire guard?**

Fire guards let you safely enjoy an open fire. It's also important to keep chimney and flues regularly swept.

## **Are you careful never to dry clothes over or near a fire?**

Drying clothes near a fire or other heater can be a fire risk.



# Useful organisations

## Age UK

We provide advice and information for people in later life through our Age UK Advice line, publications and online.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65

Lines are open seven days a week from 8am to 7pm.

[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

Call Age UK Advice to find out whether there is a local Age UK near you, and to order free copies of our information guides and factsheets.

In Wales, contact

**Age Cymru:** 0800 022 3444

[www.agecymru.org.uk](http://www.agecymru.org.uk)

In Northern Ireland, contact

**Age NI:** 0808 808 7575

[www.ageni.org](http://www.ageni.org)

In Scotland, contact **Age Scotland** by calling Silver Line Scotland: 0800 470 8090 (This is a partnership between The Silver Line and Age Scotland)

[www.agescotland.org.uk](http://www.agescotland.org.uk)

## Action on Hearing Loss

Provides advice and support for people who are deaf or hard of hearing through an information line, tinnitus helpline and range of factsheets.

Tel: 0808 808 0123

Textphone: 0808 808 9000

Hearing check phone line: 0844 800 3838

Tinnitus helpline: 0808 808 6666

Tinnitus textphone: 0808 808 9000

[www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk)

### **Disabled Living Foundation**

Provides impartial advice on products and equipment that help with daily living.

Tel: 0300 999 004

[www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk)

### **Fold**

Provides free support and advice for people in Northern Ireland applying for a Disabled Facilities Grant.

Tel: 028 9042 8314

[www.foldgroup.co.uk/stayingput](http://www.foldgroup.co.uk/stayingput)

### **Foundations**

National body for Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs), with a website you can use to find your nearest one in England.

Tel: 0845 864 5210

[www.foundations.uk.com](http://www.foundations.uk.com)

In Scotland, contact **Care and Repair Scotland**

Tel: 0141 221 9879

[www.careandrepairsotland.co.uk](http://www.careandrepairsotland.co.uk)

In Wales, contact **Care and Repair Cymru**

Tel: 0300 111 3333

[www.careandrepair.org.uk](http://www.careandrepair.org.uk)

### **Gas Safe Register**

You can check if an engineer is on the register by visiting the website or by calling.

Tel: 0800 408 5500

[www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)

### **Handyperson scheme**

The Age UK Group offers Handyperson schemes to older people in some areas who meet certain criteria, to assist with small repairs and reduce risks in the home. Call Age UK Advice on 0800 169 65 65 to find out whether it operates in your area.

### **National Association for Professional Inspectors and Testers (NAPIT)**

Can provide details of qualified electricians and installers.

Tel: 01623 811 483

[www.napit.org.uk](http://www.napit.org.uk) (go to 'find a member' to search)

### **National Grid Gas Emergency Number**

If you smell gas, call the gas emergency number on 0800 111 999.

In Northern Ireland, call 0800 002 001

### **RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents)**

Provides detailed advice on specific safety problems.

Tel: 0121 248 2000

[www.rospa.org.uk](http://www.rospa.org.uk)

# Can you help Age UK?

Please complete the donation form below with a gift of whatever you can afford and return to: RSXZ-KTTS-KSHT, Age UK, Tavis House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, LONDON WC1H 9NA. Alternatively, you can phone 0800 169 87 87 or visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/donate](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/donate). If you prefer, you can donate directly to one of our national or local partners. Thank you.

## Personal details

Title:	Initials:	Surname:
Address:		
Postcode:		
Tel:	Email:	

By providing your email address and/or mobile number you are agreeing to us contacting you in these ways. You may contact us at any time to unsubscribe from our communications.

## Your gift

I would like to make a gift of: £

I enclose a cheque/postal order made payable to Age UK

## Card payment

I wish to pay by (please tick)  MasterCard  Visa  CAF CharityCard  
 Maestro  American Express

(Maestro only)

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	Signature <b>X</b>
Expiry date	/	Issue no. (Maestro only)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		

## Gift aid declaration

(please tick) Yes, I want Age UK and its partner organisations\* to treat all donations I have made for the four years prior to this year, and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as gift aid donations. I confirm I pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax that the charity will reclaim on my donations in the tax year. Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_ (please complete). \*Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI



We will use the information you have supplied to communicate with you according to data protection guidelines. Age UK (registered charity number 1128267) comprises the charity, its group of companies and national partners (Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI). If you would prefer not to hear from them or carefully selected third parties, let us know by phoning 0800 107 8977.



# Supporting the work of Age UK

Age UK aims to enable all older people to love later life. We provide vital services, support, information and advice to thousands of older people across the UK.

In order to offer free information guides like this one, Age UK relies on the generosity of its supporters. If you would like to help us, here are a few ways you could get involved:

**1 Make a donation**  
To make a donation to Age UK, simply complete the enclosed donation form, call us on **0800 169 8787** or visit **[www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved)**

**2 Donate items to our shops**  
By donating an unwanted item to one of our shops, you can help generate vital funds to support our work. To find your nearest Age UK shop, visit **[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)** and enter your postcode into the ‘What does Age UK do in your area?’ search function. Alternatively, call us on **0800 169 8787**

**3 Leave a gift in your will**  
Nearly half the money we receive from supporters come from gifts left in wills. To find out more about how you could help in this way, please call the Age UK legacy team on **020 3033 1421** or email **[legacies@ageuk.org.uk](mailto:legacies@ageuk.org.uk)**



**Thank  
you!**

# What should I do now?

For more information on the issues covered in this guide, or to order any of our publications, please call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65** or visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/homeandcare](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/homeandcare)

Our publications are also available in large print and audio formats.

The following Age UK information guides may be useful:

- *Avoiding scams*
- *Staying safe*
- *Staying steady*

The Age UK Group offers a wide range of products and services specially designed for people in later life. For more information, please call **0800 169 18 19**.

If contact details for your local Age UK are not in the box below, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.

