

Care Partner Information

Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia Caregiving Tips

Home Safety Issues Part II: Dementia & Fire Safety

Fire Safety

House fires and burns are real dangers for people with dementia and their families. In addition to following the tips outlined in this sheet, be sure that there are smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors on each floor. Have a fire extinguisher nearby. Make sure everything is in working order.

The three big causes of house fires and burns are cooking, space heaters, and cigarettes.

Safe Cooking

Many people with dementia want to live at home for as long as they can. Being able to cook is important for independence, but it has to be balanced with safety. As the dementia worsens, a person's abilities change. Therefore, it's important to check the person's abilities often to make sure they are still able to cook safely. This skill check is important to do whether the person with dementia is living alone, or with others.

The table below tells why most people with dementia should be supervised when they are cooking.

Why Most People with Dementia Shouldn't Cook Alone

- They may start to cook a meal and forget what they were doing.
- They may leave the stove on for too many hours or overnight.
- They may burn food on the stovetop and cause a fire.
- They may lose sense of time and leave water boiling in a pot too long. The water may dry up completely and the pot can melt from the high heat. They may burn themselves if they don't realize how hot the pot is.
- They may leave the gas on and cause an explosion.
- They may forget to be careful around an open flame and severely burn themselves or start a house fire.
- They may forget how to safely use a microwave and turn it on for way too long, or use metal containers. They may spill hot food or water on themselves.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for someone with Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

There are some things you can do in the kitchen to help people with dementia maintain their independence and reduce the risk of fires. The table below has some suggestions:

| Tips for Safe Cooking | |
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| Label cupboards with pictures and easy words. Keep easy instructions nearby. Buy simple foods. | Use things that are easy to identify and are used for only one thing, such as a kettle. |
| Keep the kitchen well lit. | Remove dangerous tools, such as very sharp knives. |
| Contact the gas or electricity company to get on their “priority service register.” They will come to the home to do regular safety checks and they will also teach about special safety options available. | Consider buying appliances that switch off automatically, such as an electric kettle. |

Space Heaters

Space heaters can be very dangerous. People with dementia should always be supervised when using them. Many of the older models don’t have the safety features of the newer types. They may not automatically turn off after a certain period of time. You should also check the heater to make sure it’s not damaged. For example, don’t use it if the cord is worn or frayed.

| Tips for Safe Use of Space Heaters |
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| Make sure there is at least 3 feet of clear space around the heater. |
| Place the space heater out of walking areas so people don’t trip. |
| Take away the heater immediately if the person with dementia uses the heater for drying clothes or other unsafe activities. |

Smoking

People with dementia should always be supervised when smoking cigarettes. The symptoms of dementia, such as forgetfulness and poor judgment, make smoking very risky.

| Tips For Smoking Safety | |
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| Do not give them their own lighter or matches. | Don’t allow them to smoke in bed. |
| Make sure they don’t drop hot ashes on their clothes or chair. | Make sure the cigarette is put completely out when done. |
| Encourage outside smoking. | Set up an outside smoking area. |

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