

## Preventing Accidents in the Home – Advice Tips

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Unfortunately your home is the place where accidents are most likely to occur. Everyone should be aware of the dangers in the home so that accidents can be avoided. The purpose of this information sheet is to raise awareness of the type of accidents that may occur in the home and what steps you can take to prevent them.



### Fire Safety

Fires can start suddenly and spread quickly, damaging your home and furniture and putting lives in danger. They are caused in a variety of ways, but there are a few simple hints you can follow to prevent them starting.

- Keep all fires and heaters well-guarded, especially open fires. For fitted or portable heaters with a built in guard, give extra protection by adding a surrounding guard particularly if you have young children or older people in the home. For children, use a nursery guard with side clips that fit into fixed wall brackets.
- Keep portable heaters and candles away from furniture and curtains. Position safely where they cannot be knocked over.
- Don't dry or air clothes over or near the fire, or the cooker.
- Do not smoke in bed.
- Many fires start in the kitchen, especially fat fires. Never leave a pan unattended when deep fat frying and watch for overheating. For safer frying use oven chips or a thermostatically controlled deep fat fryer.
- If there are children around, keep matches and lighters well out of reach.
- Fit approved smoke detectors on each floor. Choose a smoke alarm that is mains operated or one with a long life (ten year) battery.
- Plan your escape route. Remember Get Out, Stay Out and call the fire brigade Out!

### Electrical Safety

Many accidents and fatalities involve electricity - it must be treated with respect. Here are some tips.

- Have your wiring installation checked at least once every five years by an approved contractor, or straightaway if you are buying an older property. Look for an NICEIC or ECA member.
- Do not use appliances with worn or damaged flexes. Don't wire flexes together.
- Keep portable mains-operated appliances out of the bathroom.
- Have electric blankets serviced and checked regularly.
- If an appliance appears faulty stop using it and have it checked at once.
- Consider having a RCD (Residual Current Device) for whole house protection. These are especially valuable when power tools are used.
- Look for the CE mark, the BEAB mark, BS safety mark or British Standard number when you buy electrical equipment.
- Never overload an electric socket.

### Heating and Cooking

Safety is especially important when choosing and using heating products.

- All fuel-burning appliances use up fresh air as they burn, and give off waste gases including the deadly carbon monoxide (CO). Never block air vents or airbricks and service appliances annually.
- Be aware of symptoms of CO poisoning such as drowsiness and flu like symptoms.
- If you use a chimney or flue, or bring one back into use, have it swept at least once a year, or more frequently if you burn wood.

- Never block any outside grilles or rest anything against it.
- If a gas flame, which normally burns blue, burns orange this may be a built up of carbon monoxide. Have your appliance checked immediately.
- Check the pilot regularly on gas cookers and water heaters to make sure it has not gone out.
- When buying gas appliances look for the British Standards safety mark or British Seal of Approval and beware of second hand bargains and cowboy installers.
- If you suspect a gas leak, open the windows, turn off the supply and call your gas supplier. Don't operate switches as a spark could ignite the gas.
- Always keep a special watch on young children and elderly people when fires and heaters are in use.

### **The kitchen is where some of the most serious home accidents occur.**

- Plan your storage areas carefully so that heavy items are not kept on high shelves, and items in daily use are within easy reach.
- Take extra care with hot water, tea, coffee or soup. If there are young children around, they could get scalded.
- Keep knives sharp and in good condition and out of reach of children.
- Keep panhandles turned inward so that children cannot reach them and pull them over.
- Use a cordless kettle or one with a coiled lead so that children cannot pull on them.

## **Safety Glass**

Ordinary glass is dangerous – particularly at low level – because it breaks in to large, jagged pieces, which can cause serious injury. The Building Regulations require safety glass to be fitted in glazed doors, side panels and areas below 800mm in new buildings.

- Safety glass is specially made. There are two main types: laminated glass and toughened glass. When it breaks it breaks safely – in a way unlikely to cause injury.
- If ordinary glass is in use, you can help reduce the risks.
- Make sure that people know that the glass is there and see that the area is well lit.
- Never let children play near glass – they could easily crash through it and receive a serious injury.

## **Safety with Medicines and Cleaners**

Chemical preparations of any sort, whether in the form of medicines or household cleaners should always be treated with caution.

- Consider having a proper lockable cabinet fitted in the kitchen for medicines and chemicals where it is more likely to be supervised.
- Keep medicines in their original containers, clearly labelled.
- Do not take other people's medicine, or let them take yours.
- Return leftover medicines to the pharmacist for destruction – don't hoard them.
- Keep medicines, chemical and cleaning products such as bleach, turps and caustic soda where children cannot see or reach them.
- Chemicals used in the garden, garage or workshop need to be used and stored with great care. Store them in a safe place where children can't see or reach them.
- Keep cosmetics, perfumes and essential oils away from children.

## **DIY and Garden Safety**

Over ambition and lack of knowledge are two of the biggest factors in causing death and injury related DIY accidents.

- Be realistic and don't tackle a job unless you really have the ability. A competent, qualified person should always carry out gas and electrical renewal or repair work.
- Keep any tools clean and in good repair, and give each one a quick check over before you use it.
- Always plan ahead – accidents happen more easily if you are unprepared and rush.
- Wear appropriate clothing and sturdy shoes when mowing the lawn and keep your feet and hands well away from the mower blades.
- Stop and disconnect all electrical appliances and tools before working on them.

- Ensure that all tools, paint and chemicals are kept safely out of the reach of children.
- Take extra care with sharp cutting tools.
- Follow makers' instructions very carefully when using adhesives, especially the instant type.
- Use an RCD – residual current device – if your home is not already wired as standard.
- Keep children and pets away when carrying out DIY.
- Keep barbecues well away from trees, buildings and fences. Never pour petrol on a barbecue.
- Some plants and berries are poisonous or can cause an allergic reaction.
- Keep all products in their original containers.

*Source: RoSPA The Home Safety Book Ref: HS 178*