



KEYS TO EMBRACING AGING

Practice Being Safe

LaVona S. Traywick, Associate Professor of Gerontology, University of Arkansas
Amy F. Hosier, Assistant Professor of Family Sciences, University of Kentucky
Erin Yelland, Doctoral Student, Family Sciences, University of Kentucky

Practicing safety is important because it helps keep you out of harm's way. Over the course of our lives, we learn and practice safety, such as looking both ways before crossing the street, wearing a seat belt or locking our doors when away or at night. Simple lifestyle changes and recognizing where most hazards are and how danger or injuries can occur when participating in different activities are keys to safe living.

Safety across the lifespan includes a multitude of realms. The following safety tips are just a few that reflect various life domains: home, transportation, health, recreation and emergency preparedness.

HOME SAFETY

Home is often a place that represents security and comfort. There is no place more important to keep safe than your home. The Underwriters Laboratories (UL) recommend the following home safety tips:

- **Make your house number visible.** In case of an emergency, a house number that is easy to find and read from the street helps emergency personnel find the correct home.
- **Lock doors and windows.** Be sure to have high-quality locks on both your doors and windows.
- **Sound the alarm.** Install smoke detectors on every floor of your home and carbon monoxide detectors near sleeping areas. If already installed, test them! Replace the batteries every daylight-saving time change.
- **Avoid overload.** Check for overloaded extension cords – usage should not exceed the recommended wattage.
- **Watch cord placement.** Extension cords should not be placed under rugs or heavy furniture, tacked up or coiled while in use.
- **Don't get tippy.** If young children are in the home, bookshelves and other furniture should be firmly secured with wall brackets to prevent tipping.
- **Paint safe.** Check walls for loose paint. If repainting, do so in a well-ventilated area and consider volatile organic compounds (VOC)-free paint.
- **Childproof.** There are many things to think about when childproofing a home. Areas of particular danger include outlets, appliances, electronics, stairs and windows.
- **Get grounded.** All major appliances should be grounded. Be sure to check your ground fault circuit interrupters regularly.
- **Plan your escape.** Practice a fire escape plan with your family where you identify two exits for every room and what to do with young children.
- **Keep extinguishers handy.** Place all-purpose fire extinguishers in key locations in your home – the kitchen, bedroom and basement. Be sure to check expiration dates regularly and know how to use them safely.
- **Create a safe exit.** In addition to alarms and extinguishers, consider an escape ladder if your home has two floors. Keep emergency numbers and contacts readily available by the phone.
- **Unplug appliances.** Unplug appliances and electronics when not in use, and store them out of reach.

- **Give your air heater some space.** All air heaters should be placed at least 3 feet from beds, curtains or anything flammable.
- **Go new in the nursery.** Check that all painted cribs, bassinets and high chairs were made after 1978 to avoid potential lead paint poisoning. Follow all safety recommendations on furniture, furnishing covers and blankets.
- **Cool your jets.** Set your water heater below 120 degrees Fahrenheit to avoid potential burns and to save energy.
- **Put away medications.** Take medications and medical supplies out of your purse, pockets and drawers and put them in a cabinet with a child safety lock.

MOTOR VEHICLE SAFETY

Vehicle crashes are the leading cause of unintentional injuries and deaths for people between the ages of 1 and 33. The National Safety Council (2012) recommends several ways to reduce your likelihood of getting into an accident and staying alive if you do.

- **Wear safety belts.** Keep yourself and family safe by always buckling up.
- **Avoid distractions.** Distracted driving is a problem on the roadways. Eating, putting on makeup, getting dressed and fidgeting with children or pets are examples of various distractions that take our eyes and minds off the road.
- **Stay off cell phones.** An increasing number of accidents involve cell phone use. Talking on a cell phone while driving makes you four times more likely to crash and texting while driving increases your chance of crashing by up to 8 to 23 times.
- **Keep infants and children safe.** Motor vehicle accidents are the number one cause of death for children age 1 to 12. The best way to protect them is to place all children in age- and size-appropriate car and booster seats and to know how to properly use the seat to reduce serious and fatal injuries. Car and booster seats should be used every time a child is in a car. Children should sit in the back seat at least through the age of 12.
- **Keep teens safe.** Motor vehicle crashes are the number one cause of death for teens. Proper parental or guardian guidance in the learning-to-drive process is influential in a teen's ability to become a safe and responsible driver. This includes modeling nondistracted driving and safety belt use.
- **Keep seniors safe.** Over the next 20 years, the number of senior drivers will increase 70 percent. The crash rates for drivers age 65+ are higher than any age group, except teens. Resources are available to help keep drivers safe, including self-assessment tools, education, driver refresher courses and public transportation. Seat belt safety, being aware of medication side effects and interactions, planning trips during low traffic times, driving a car that best fits you and learning the newest highway laws and vehicle changes are also helpful tips for senior drivers.
- **Be aware of your surroundings.** Children are killed in and around vehicles each year. All are preventable. Driveway backovers and hot car deaths can be prevented by never leaving a child in or around a vehicle unattended. Be especially vigilant during hectic times, schedule changes and holidays, as these busy times can often result in tragedy. It is also important to know where you parked your car, have your keys ready before walking to your car and checking in and around a car before getting in. Once in a car, lock the doors.
- **Don't drive impaired.** Impaired driving from drinking and/or drugs puts everyone on the road in danger and is a serious threat to communities throughout the nation. To prevent impaired driving, call a friend or taxi, designate someone in the group to drive who has not been drinking and don't let your friends drive drunk.
- **Be a defensive driver.** Speeding, frequent and unnecessary lane changes, tailgating and running red or yellow lights are examples of aggressive driving that result in putting yourself, your family and other drivers in danger. Instead, practice defensive driving techniques to save lives, time and money.
- **Keep the vehicle well maintained.** Having your vehicle serviced regularly reduces mechanical problems and breakdowns. Along with regular oil changes, be sure to check that windshield wipers are in good working order and the spare tire has air in it.

HEALTH SAFETY

Good health leads to happiness, independence, satisfaction and fulfillment in life. The following are just a few tips that promote health safety, according to the National Safety Council (2012).

- **Get trained in first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and automated external defibrillator (AED).** Ideally, at least one person in each household should have these lifesaving skills. Seventy-five percent of out-of-hospital cardiac arrests occur at home, and 25 percent of hospital emergency room visits could be eliminated if someone knew first aid.
- **Visit the dentist.** By adopting lifelong healthy oral habits at home, making smart choices about diet and lifestyle and seeking regular dental care, you help your teeth last a lifetime and you contribute to overall health, as there is a connection between a healthy body and a healthy mouth. Cavities are still the most prevalent chronic disease of childhood.
- **Visit the doctor.** Annual exams and check-ups help keep children healthy and make it easier for you to stay on top of your health. During children's visits, health care providers will give any vaccines that are due, check your child's growth and development and test vision and hearing. It is important for children to get all of the recommended doses of vaccines to be completely immunized against a disease. Teens are able to start taking some responsibility for their own health. Teens should feel comfortable talking to their health care provider about health and emotional concerns, such as physical development or sexual health. As adults, regular checkups are important to help with health maintenance. With age, more frequent checkups and procedures are common for preventative measures, such as mammograms, prostate exams and colonoscopies.
- **Understand how to use and dispose of your meds.** Talk to your health care provider(s) about all the medications you take, including over-the-counter and herbal medicines and discuss side effects and possible medication interactions. Before taking a pill or giving medication to children, read the label and take it exactly as prescribed in terms of dosage, timing and whether or not it should be taken with food/drink. Don't use medicines after their expiration date and properly dispose of any unused or expired medications.
- **Prevent unintentional medication overdose.** Never take more than is prescribed. If you still have pain, call your physician to discuss your options. Refill pain medication only if you really need it and not until your current prescription is almost empty. Don't mix medications without consulting a health care provider and don't mix medication with alcohol or sedatives.
- **Protect against poisoning.** Unintentional poisoning includes the unsupervised ingestion of drugs or chemicals, "overdoses" or the excessive use of a drug and exposure to environmental substances. The most common poisons include prescription and over-the-counter medications, cleaning products and personal care products. Children are at the greatest risk of poisoning due to eating or swallowing over-the-counter and prescription medicines when an adult is not watching. Avoid leaving medication unattended on countertops and tables, loose in purses or on the floor. Put the poison control number (1-800-222-1222) on or near every home telephone and save it on your cell phone.
- **Prevent falls.** Falls are one of the leading causes of unintentional injuries in the United States. Falls cause injury, diminish independence and can even lead to death. Older adults age 65 years and older are more susceptible to falling. But, having vision and medication checked regularly, maintaining a clutter-free and safe home environment and physical activity can lower the risk of falling and the fear of falling. Supervise young children at all times around fall hazards, such as stairs and playground equipment. Whether you're at home or out to play, keep them safe and help them prevent falls.
- **Practice food safety.** Wash your hands. Know the safe minimum cooking temperatures for meat, fish and poultry. Properly use and wash cutting boards. Wash all fruits and vegetables. Know how to properly store leftovers.
- **Practice safe sex.** Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality— it is important no matter how old you are. As part of their education, children – once they reach an appropriate age – need to learn about sex and sexuality from reliable sources so they better understand male and female bodies and how they work. Adolescence education, from the reliable source (preferably their parent or guardian), should teach about human sexual development, reproduction, types of relationships, healthy versus unhealthy relationships, sexual behavior and how to prevent pregnancy and

STIs (sexually transmitted infections). Moral behavior or family standards regarding premarital sex have to be taught. Adults, even those past the age of bearing children, also need to be aware of sexual health and STIs so they practice healthy behaviors.

RECREATIONAL SAFETY

The National Safety Council (2012) reports that recreation-related injuries affect people of all ages and account for many injury-related emergency room visits.

- **Avoid injury while exercising.** When first starting an exercise program, begin slowly with low-intensity exercises. Stretch and warm up with low-intensity exercises at the beginning of each exercise session. Drink water before, during and after you exercise. Wait at least 2 hours after eating a large meal before doing strenuous exercise. Wear appropriate shoes for your activity and comfortable clothing that allows you to move freely but won't catch on objects. When outdoors, pay attention to your surroundings – consider possible traffic hazards, the weather, uneven walking surfaces and strangers.
 - **Children and exercise.** Children should wear protective gear during sports and recreation. For example, when in-line skating, use wrist guards, knee and elbow pads and a helmet.
 - **Older adults and exercise.** It is important to check with a health care provider before beginning an exercise program. Start out slowly. Be cautious of surgeries, such as hip replacements and follow precautions for any health issue that you may have. Perform the exercise safely and within the limits of your abilities.
- **Learn how to swim.** While swimming does not make drowning impossible, it can make it less likely to happen.
- **Prevent dog bites.** Teach children basic safety around dogs and help them be comfortable versus afraid of dogs. Do not approach an unfamiliar dog and, if approached yourself, stand still versus running and screaming. If you are knocked over by a dog, roll into a ball and lie still. Avoid eye contact. Do not disturb a dog who is sleeping, eating or caring for puppies. Do not pet or approach a dog without allowing it to see or sniff you first. If a dog is with his/her owner, ask before you pet the dog. Report stray dogs or dogs displaying unusual behavior. Immediately report any bite to a medical health provider.
- **Prevent playground injuries.** Falls on the playground are a common cause of injury. Check to make sure the surfaces under playground equipment are safe, soft and well-maintained (such as wood chips or sand, not dirt or grass).
- **Travel safely.** Traveling can be fun and exciting, but unwary tourists can make for easy targets. General safety suggestions include: Don't share your travel plans on social media or with people you don't know well. Highlighting that you are going to be gone can increase the risk of break-ins and robberies. Do let a trusted neighbor know so that an eye can be kept on the house. If you're driving, know your route. Pack a map or GPS and be familiar with places to stop for food, drink and gas. At the airport, keep your ticket, identification and passport (if needed) with you at all times. Watch for your suitcase as it appears on the carousel upon landing.
- **Hotel safety.** If possible, choose accommodation that has unmarked 'swipe cards' rather than numbered keys for each room. If you lose your swipe card or if it is stolen, the thief won't know which room to rob. Take note of emergency exits, stairwells, fire escapes and emergency plans. Always lock your hotel door, including the deadbolt or chain. If arranging to meet people you've never met before (such as business associates), wait for them in the lobby. Don't ask them to come up to your room. Ask a hotel concierge about safe versus unsafe local areas.
- **Street smarts.** Limit your night travel, especially if the territory is unfamiliar and known to be dangerous. If you are overseas, always keep your passport with you (on a safety belt, under your clothes) and make a photocopy of your passport and all other documents; keep those copies in a safe place. Use ATMs during the day, when there are people around. Try to rely more on credit cards than cash. Even if you're not sure where you're going, walk like you've got a purpose. Be discreet when map reading, and pay attention to your surroundings and the people around you.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Natural disasters, fires and other catastrophic events can disrupt your home, work and community with little to no warning. It is important to identify and learn about potential hazards common to your area and to make and share a plan to help prevent confusion and worry in the face of an emergency. Depending on the disaster, help may not always be there or be able to get to you due to multiple calls, blocked roads or other barriers. According to the National Safety Council (2012):

- **Determine the safest course of action for you and your family for each hazard.** In some situations, it may be better to stay where you are, also called sheltering in place. For example, this would be necessary during a tornado or hazardous chemical release. Sometimes, leaving an area to escape danger or evacuation is the safer course of action in situations such as a fire or hurricane.
- **Stay informed.** Know how your community alerts citizens in an emergency. It may be an emergency broadcast on the radio or television. You might hear a special siren, get a telephone call or emergency workers may go door to door. If available, sign up for your community's emergency text or email alert system.
- **Plan for your family's comfort during disasters.** Utility outages are common during severe weather and other emergencies. It is important to prepare a kit that can meet your household's basic needs (food, water, etc.) for 72 hours. You should also have a kit that is kept in the car.
- **Practice what to do in an emergency.** Conduct regular drills by yourself and with your family for the most common hazards such as a fire, tornado or earthquake.
- **Know how to keep in touch.** Local telephone service may be interrupted. Sometimes, it is easier to send a text message or contact a family member in another state. Each family member should know how to make contact so it can be known that they are safe.

INTERNET SAFETY

Adults and kids face several risks when they go online. Crimes and scams, such as sexual predation and identity theft, are everywhere. To stay safe on the Internet, the National Safety Council (2012) recommends:

- **Children and Internet safety.** It is important to take an active role in protecting kids from Internet predators and sexually explicit material. You can start by making yourself aware of your kids' computer activities and by educating them about online risks. You can also block or monitor material with various options made available by many Internet service providers. Other ways to keep your kids safe include:
 - Set and enforce rules regarding amount of time spent online, appropriate sites to visit and games to play.
 - Make sure your kids create a screen name to protect their real identity.
 - Keep the computer in a common area, not in individual bedrooms, where you can watch and monitor its use.
 - Share an email account with your child so you can monitor messages.
 - Bookmark kids' favorite sites for easy access.
 - Spend time online together to teach your kids appropriate online behavior.
 - Monitor your credit card and phone bills for unfamiliar account charges.
 - Find out what, if any, online protection is offered by your child's school, after-school center, friends' homes or anyplace where kids could use a computer without your supervision.
 - Look for signs your child might have been targeted by an online predator or a cyberbully. If your child is secretive, unusually quiet or spending too much time online, ask questions and be supportive.
 - Take your child seriously if he or she reports an uncomfortable online exchange.
 - Forward copies of obscene or threatening messages you or your child gets to your Internet service provider.
 - Call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 800-843-5678 if you are aware of the transmission, use or viewing of child pornography online. Contact your local law enforcement agency or the FBI if your child has received child pornography via the Internet.

- **Adult Internet safety.** The Internet is used for many things, including searching for information or entertainment, communicating with family and friends, referencing educational materials, banking and e-commerce. Online activities make our lives easier but it is also a place for fraud, identity theft, invasion of privacy and other cybercrimes. Some things to consider include:
 - Use passwords wisely. Ideal passwords should have a combination of at least eight upper and lower case letters and numbers. Passwords should not use personal information such as a birth date or social security number. They should not include names of children or pets either. Passwords should be changed every 60 to 90 days and varied for different accounts. Passwords should never be stored online or in mobile devices.
 - Protect your privacy. Do not post information that identifies you or your family (names, addresses) or information that can be used to identify you, such as a nicknames, workplace or school, clubs or organizations to which you belong or favorite hangouts.
 - Document storage. Consider storing your username, personal identification numbers (PINs) and passwords in a secure location away from your residence, such as a safe deposit box at a bank or a safe in your attorney’s office. A key consideration is whether your executor will have convenient access to the documents in the event of your death.
 - Protect your computer. Shut down your computer when it’s not in use. Keep antivirus and antispyware programs updated. Use firewalls to protect against hackers. Use encryption to protect personal information.
 - Smart social networking. Don’t reveal too much about your private life due to the anonymity of the Internet. Consider how your email message could be read by others. Never post anything that would cause you embarrassment or shame. The information can be seen by anyone with a computer and an Internet connection once posted, including family and friends, employers or potential employers, admissions officers at schools you might attend – even police and other law enforcement authorities.
 - Meeting someone online. Learn as much as you can about an individual and verify that information. Don’t share your address but meet instead in a public place where you will arrive separately, and terminate all conversation if this is met with objections. Tell a trusted family member or friend of your plans and who you are meeting. Watch your alcohol intake and never leave a drink unattended. If you suspect you are being followed after your meeting, drive to the nearest police station or a public location for help.
 - Close unused accounts. Permanently close any unused account, including social media networking accounts. If a loved one has died, follow the policies for survivors to delete, update, transfer or preserve the account.
- **Scams and Cons.** Fraudulent activity can happen to anyone, regardless of age or means. Scams and cons are common. These occur via telephone, mail, in person or increasingly the Internet.
 - Never give personal information (social security number or bank information) to anyone who shows up at your door or calls on the phone. If they say they are from the bank, they should have your numbers already. The only exception is if you have called an agency and you are sure you reached the right one.
 - Be cautious of “free” deals where you must pay for taxes or shipping and handling. As a general rule, if you are receiving something for free, the company sponsoring the gift will pay the taxes/shipping.
 - Don’t get pressured into “limited time offers.” These so-called deals usually have a catch, such as balloon interest rate, where there is zero or a low interest rate for a limited time. If the debt is not paid off by a set date, the interest rate is extremely high. It is best to think about the deal, call or go back for more information. It is also good to talk about it with family and friends if you are not sure.

CONCLUSION

Recognizing situations that put your safety and well-being at risk and being aware of ways to prevent danger or injury when participating in different activities are key to safe living and optimal aging.

REFERENCES

- American Dental Association. (2012). Dentists: Doctors of oral health. Retrieved August 25, 2012, from www.ada.org/4504.aspx.
- Better Health Channel. (2012). Travel Safety Tips. Retrieved August 25, 2012, from www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Travel_safety_tips.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). Drinking and Driving: A threat to everyone. Retrieved August 25, 2012, from www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/drinkinganddriving/.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). Home and recreational safety. Retrieved August 25, 2012, from www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/index.html.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012). Traveler's health. Retrieved August 5, 2012, from www.cdc.gov/travel.
- Federal Trade Commission. www.ftc.gov.
- Harris, M. (2009). Be MedWise Arkansas. Retrieved August 1, 2012, from www.kidsarus.org/volunteers/volunteer_leader_training_guide/2009/medicines_h5.pdf.
- National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration. (2012). Is your child in the right car seat? Retrieved August 25, 2012, from www.nhtsa.gov/Safety/CPS.
- National Safety Council. (2012). Safety + Health. Retrieved August 25, 2012, from www.nsc.org/Pages/Home.aspx. Lists from NSC reprinted with permission.
- Nemours. (2012). Kids Health. Internet Safety. Retrieved August 26, 2012, from http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/net_safety.html.
- Nemours. (2012). Kids Health. Swimming. Retrieved August 25, 2012, from http://kidshealth.org/kid/kh_misc/nemours.html.
- Traywick, L. S., and K. Cobb. (2009). *Increasing Physical Activity as We Age: Balance*. Retrieved August 1, 2012, from www.uaex.edu/Other_Areas/publications/PDF/FSFCS31.pdf.
- Underwriters Laboratories. (2012). Home Safety. Retrieved August 25, 2012, from www.safetyathome.com/home-safety/?gclid=ClrUpfOYhLICFVOQ7Qodm3IApw. Lists from UL reprinted with permission.
- USAA Educational Foundation. (2012). Internet Safety for Adults. Retrieved August 26, 2012, from https://www.usaaedfoundation.org/Safety/safety_572_internet_safety_for_adults.
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2011). Food Safety. Retrieved August 25, 2012, from www.fda.gov/food/foodsafety/default.htm.