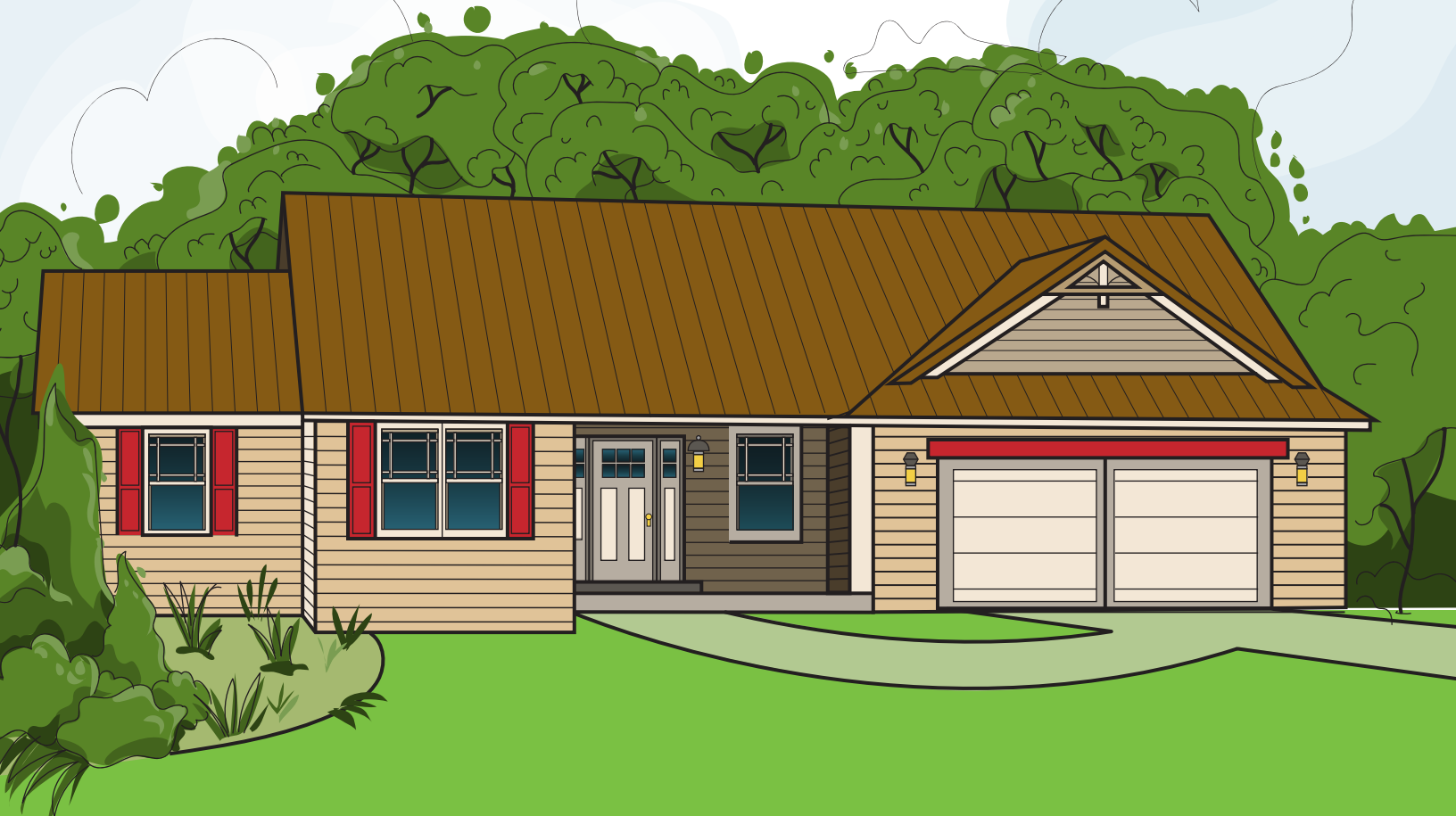


A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

**KEEPING THE
PERSON
WITH MEMORY LOSS
SAFER AT HOME**





A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES KEEPING THE PERSON WITH MEMORY LOSS SAFER AT HOME



Brought to you by the New England and Greater Los Angeles Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Centers, and by the Geriatric Scholars Program with funding from the VA Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care

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ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet tells you how to help keep the person with memory loss (including those with Alzheimer's Disease and other dementias) safer at home. It is designed to be used at your own pace and referred to as needed as your loved one with memory loss experiences changes. It is not possible to make your home completely safe, but these easy and low cost suggestions will solve the most common safety problems in your home.

CLOSE SUPERVISION OF THE PERSON WITH MEMORY LOSS MAY STILL BE NEEDED EVEN IN THE SAFEST HOME.

These suggestions are from Caregivers of Veterans who participated in earlier safety studies. These studies showed a decrease in accidents among Veterans and an increase in their Caregivers' confidence to care for the Veterans when they were given this information and made some changes in their homes.

THIS BOOKLET INCLUDES:

- Things you can do to make your home safer
- Caregiver stories about safety at home
- Where to find Home Safety Items
- A Home Safety Check List that will help you to keep track of changes you make in your home.

SAFETY FROM WANDERING AND GETTING LOST



Any person with dementia who can walk, can wander and that person is at risk to become missing and injured. Using a medical alert bracelet can provide critical medical information to the community support network including emergency responders. The ID bracelet should say the person has dementia or memory loss.



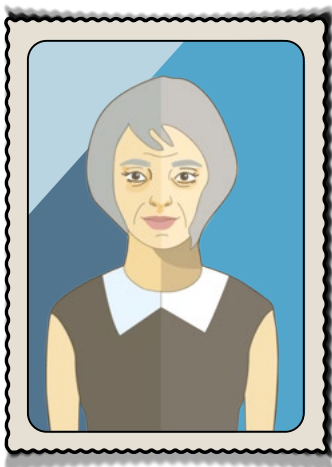
I really like the ID bracelet. That's the one suggestion I'd use the most.



- Caregiver story

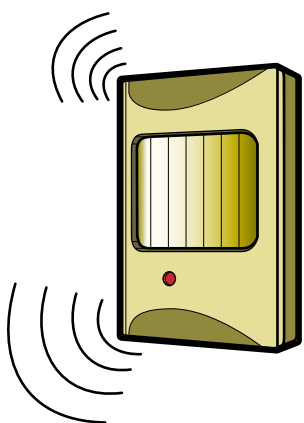


Giving the name and a recent picture of the person to your local police may help in case the person wanders away and gets lost.



Tell trusted neighbors that the person has memory problems and might get lost. Keep a list of their names and phone numbers.



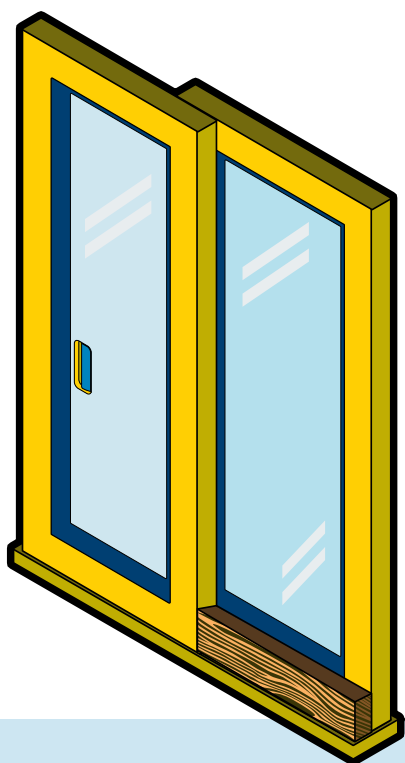
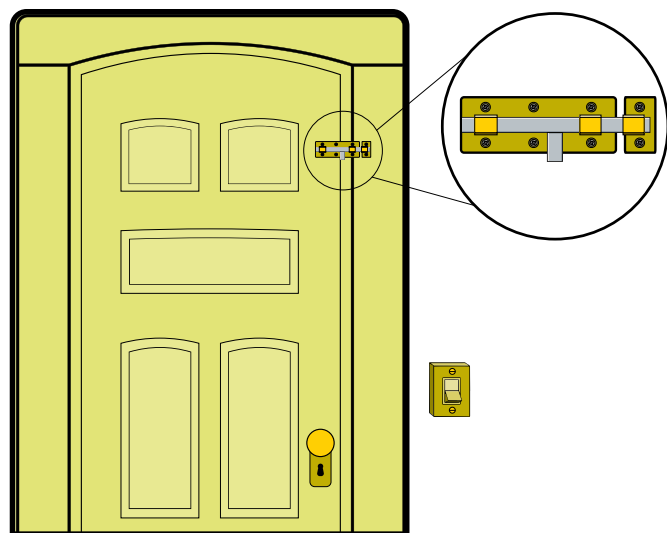


Use a motion sensor to warn you when the person wanders to an exit door or to a risky room such as the kitchen.

“ It gives me peace of mind. I’d look out and he’d be in the driveway and so I started putting it on and it was wonderful. He didn’t set it off every day, but he set it off a lot and it saved him from getting out a lot. ”

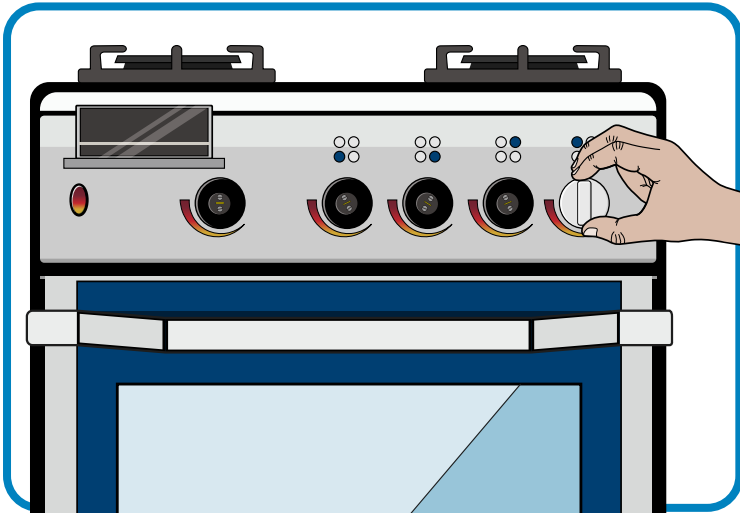
- Caregiver story

Put a **slide-bolt lock** at the top or bottom of doors to the outside, so the person will not notice it.



Lock sliding glass doors or use a wood stick or “dowel” (by placing it in the runner at the bottom) from the hardware store to lock the sliding door.

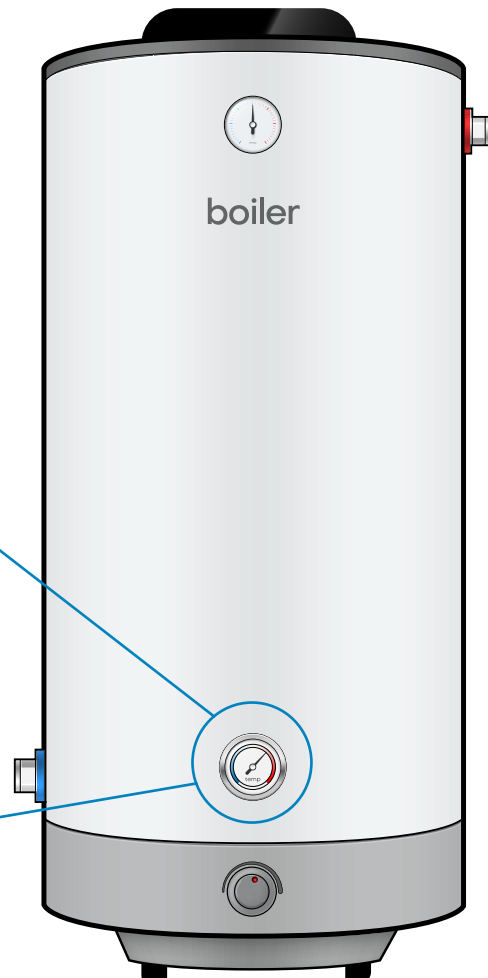
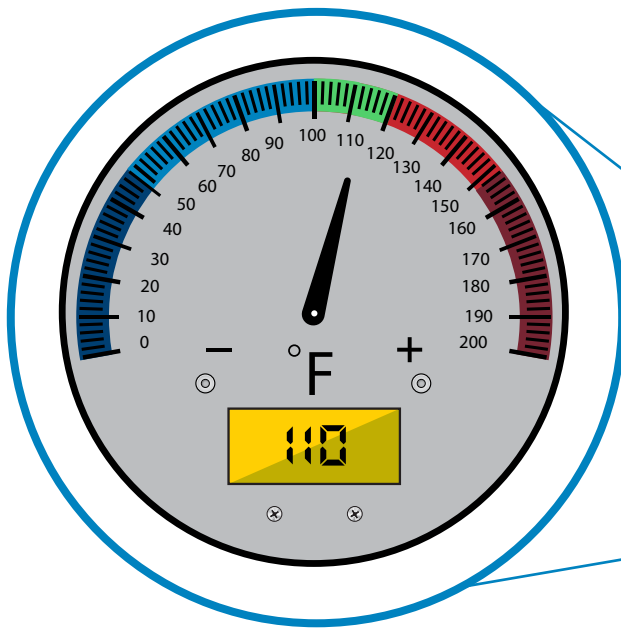
MAKING THE KITCHEN SAFER



Remove stove knobs and hide them in a nearby drawer. You can also use **stove knob covers** made for child safety.

In a recent study of home safety problems, accidents at the stove were frequent, even for persons who did not cook or use the stove before.


Reset water temperature to **110–120 degrees**. This temperature feels warm for bathing and cleaning, but will not cause a burn if no cold water is added.



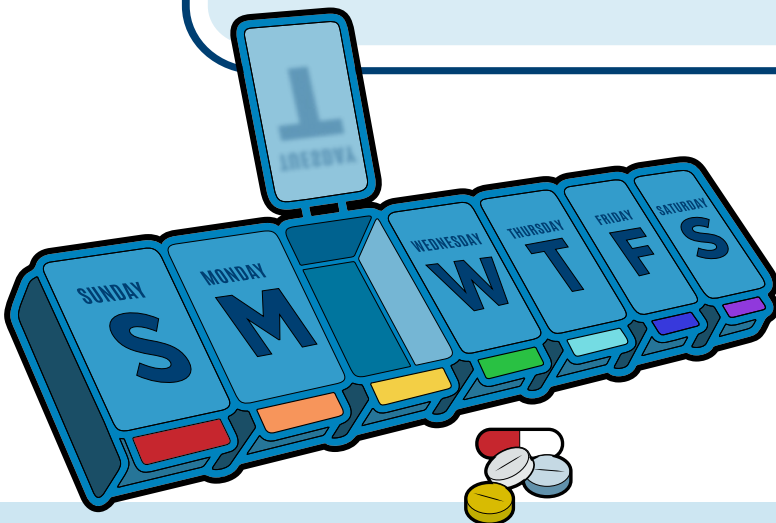


Many people keep medicines in the kitchen. Hide medicine in a cabinet or lock it in a closet. Remove all medicine and vitamins from counters.



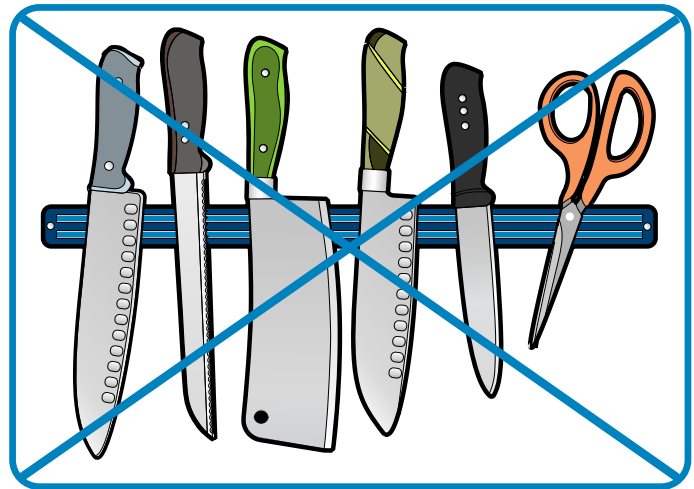
That big pill box was really nice because I could sit down when he was resting and count out all the pills. When it was time to take his pills I could just get that box. So that was really helpful and I couldn't make a mistake on counting. 

- Caregiver story



MAKING THE KITCHEN SAFER

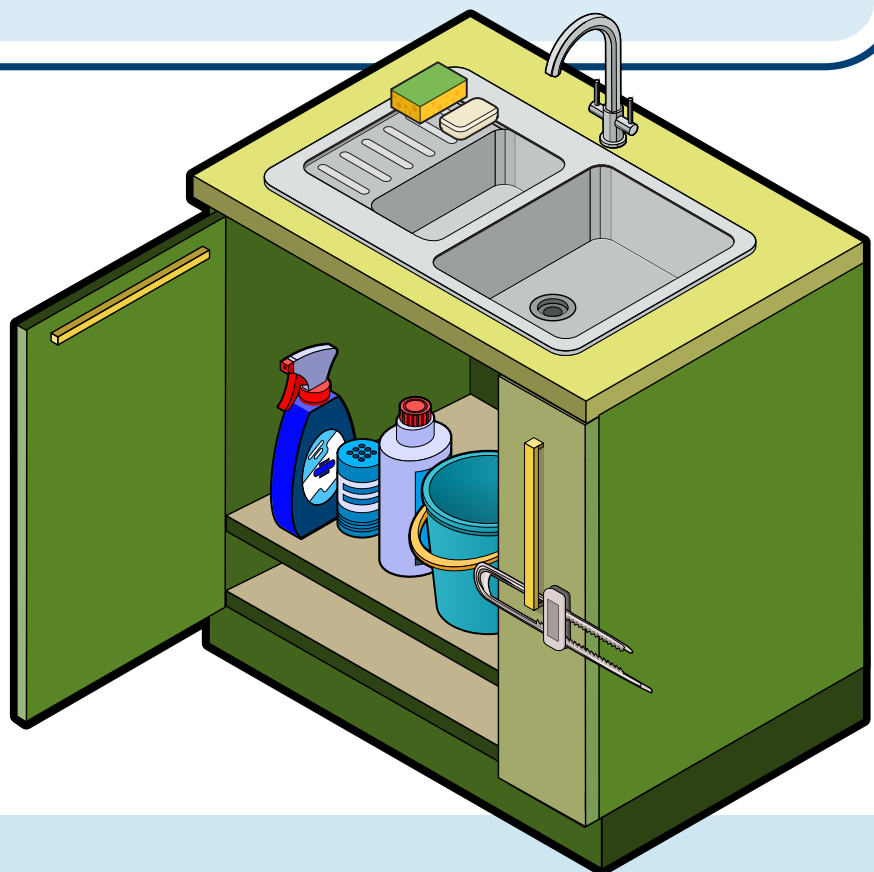
Remove scissors and knives from counters and drawers. Keep one large and one small knife for your use in a drawer or cabinet out of sight.



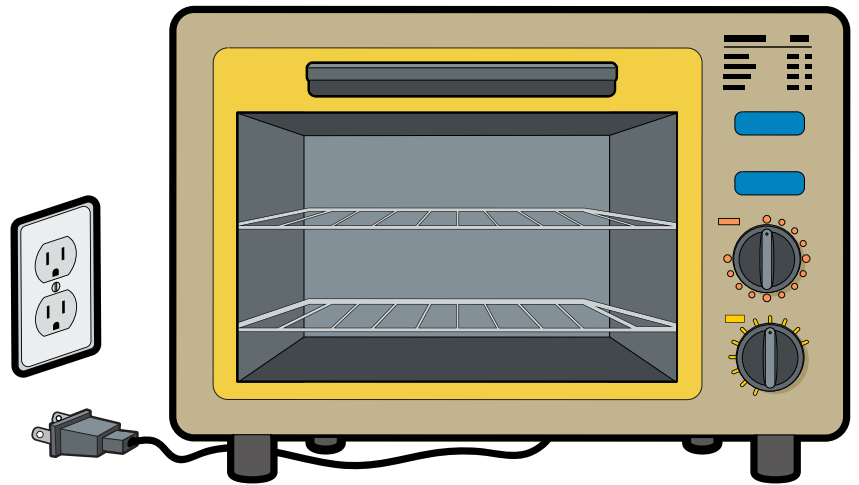
PP *I just took everything out from under the sink where I usually kept them and put them in the closet in the pantry there. It's just a few more steps, but for a few more steps you may save yourself a lot of trouble. That closet has a lock on it. QQ*

- Caregiver story

Remove dangerous cleaning supplies such as drain cleaner and bleaches from cabinets. Lock these poisonous substances in a closet. Use a **slide bolt lock** or a **keyed doorknob**.



Unplug electrical appliances when you are not using them. Place the cord behind the appliance so the plug is not visible. Unplug the toaster oven.



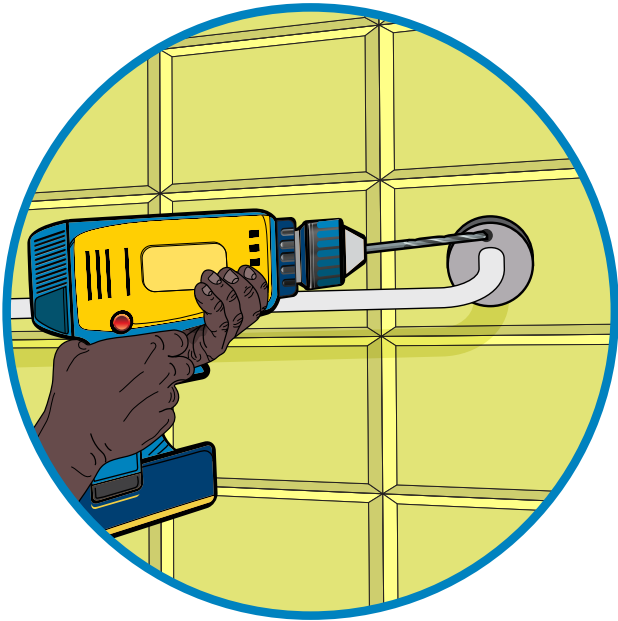
“ Most homes have a microwave. He started a fire in the microwave. He tried to use it and there were utensils in it. Make sure you have it unplugged. ”

- Caregiver story

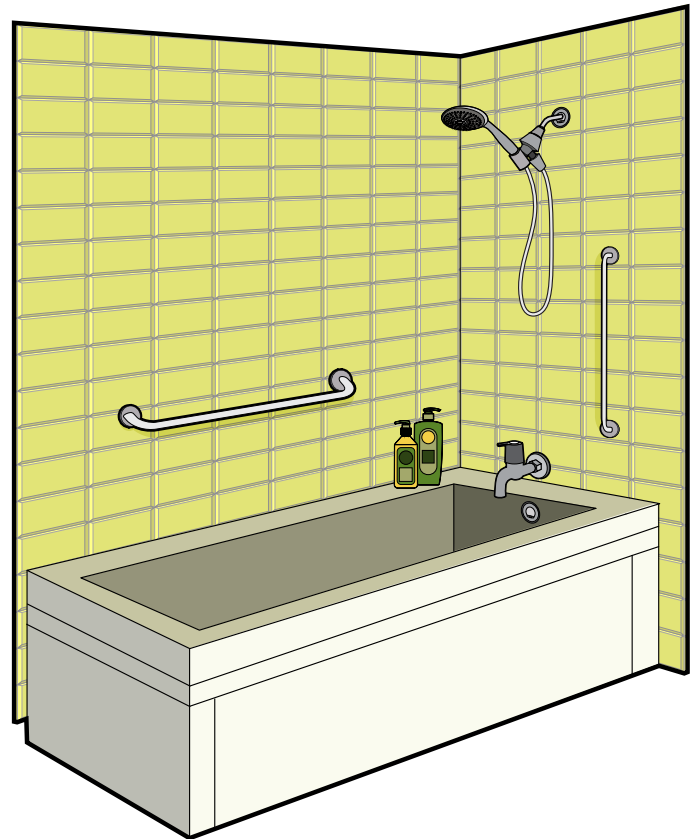


If it cannot be unplugged, supervise the person with memory loss to prevent burns from hot liquids or other accidents.

MAKING THE BATHROOM SAFER



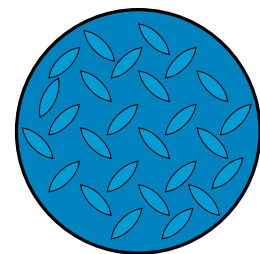
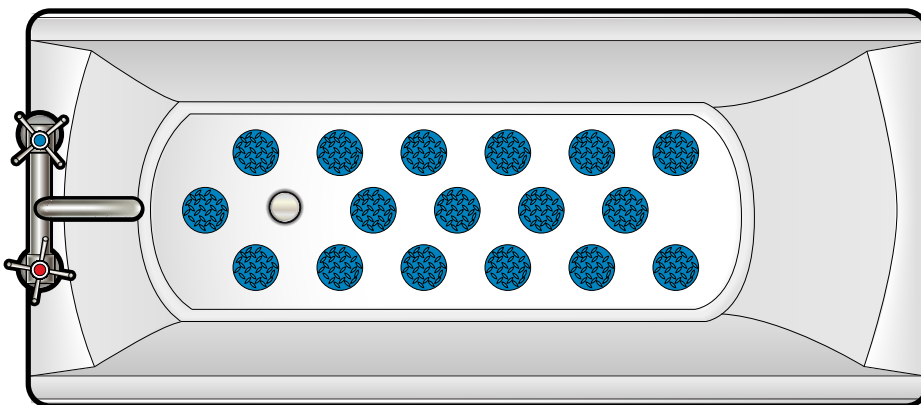
Install **safety rails** in the tub and shower. Install **grab bars** at the front and side walls of the shower. Grab bars **MUST** be screwed into wall studs.

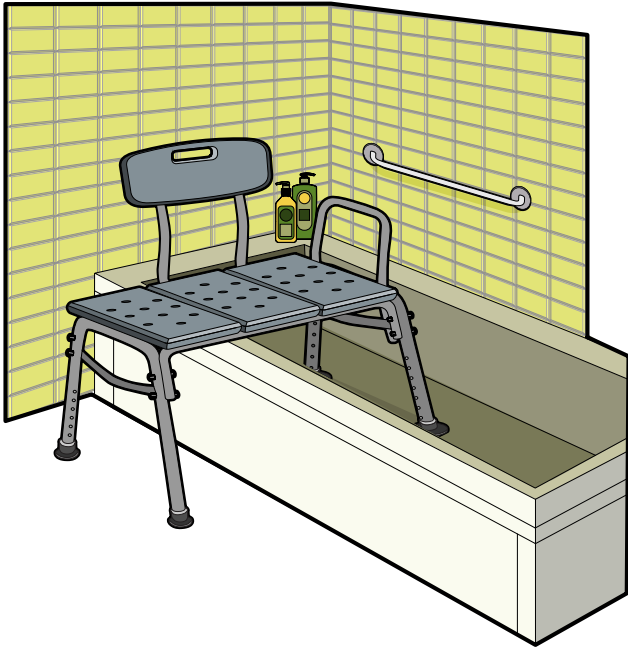


PP Putting the bar in the shower was very good for him because he got in and out of the shower with ease. QQ

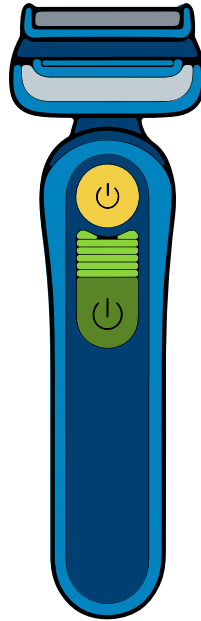
- Caregiver story

Use **non-skid appliqués** or **bathmats** with strong suction cups in the shower and tub.



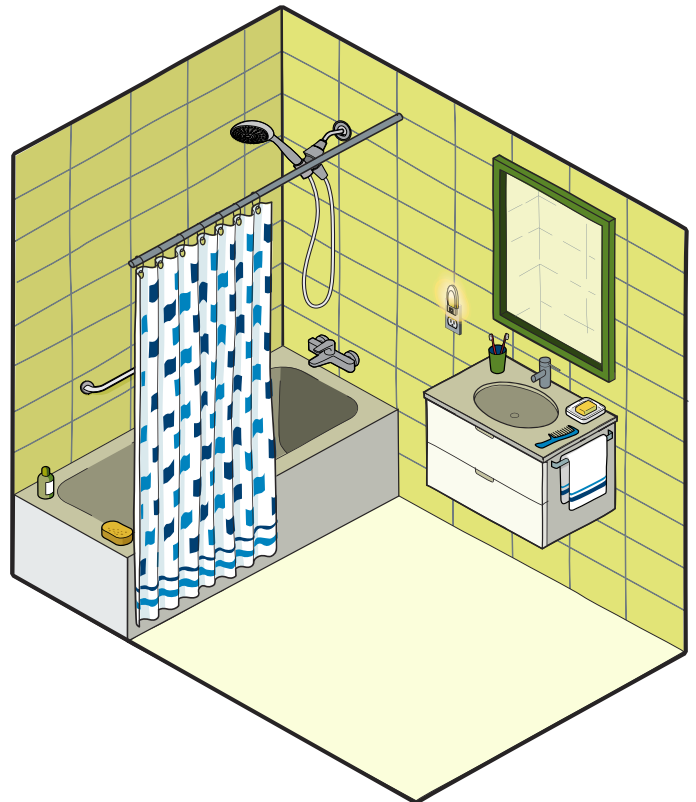
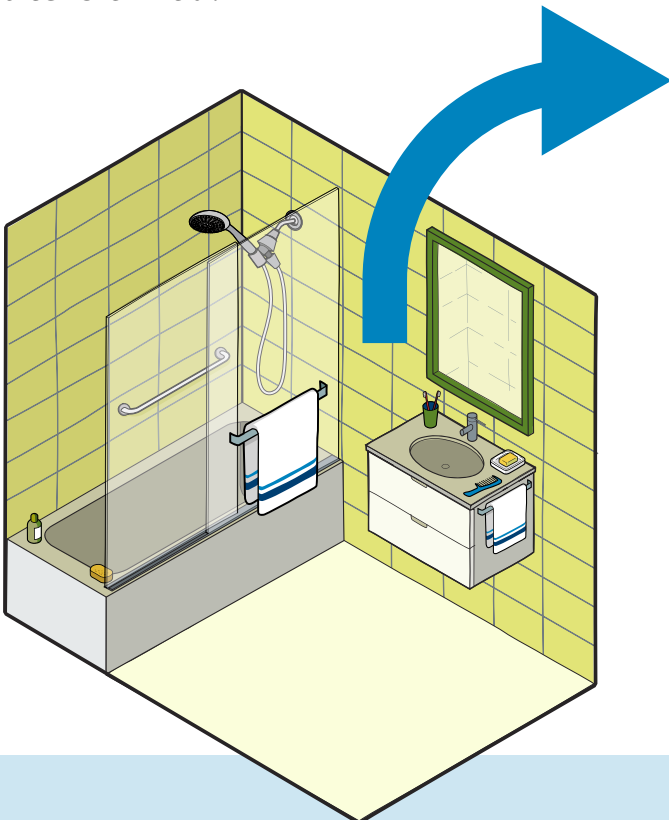


Use a shower bench in the shower or tub. We recommend the **Tub Transfer Bench with Back** because it is more stable than others.

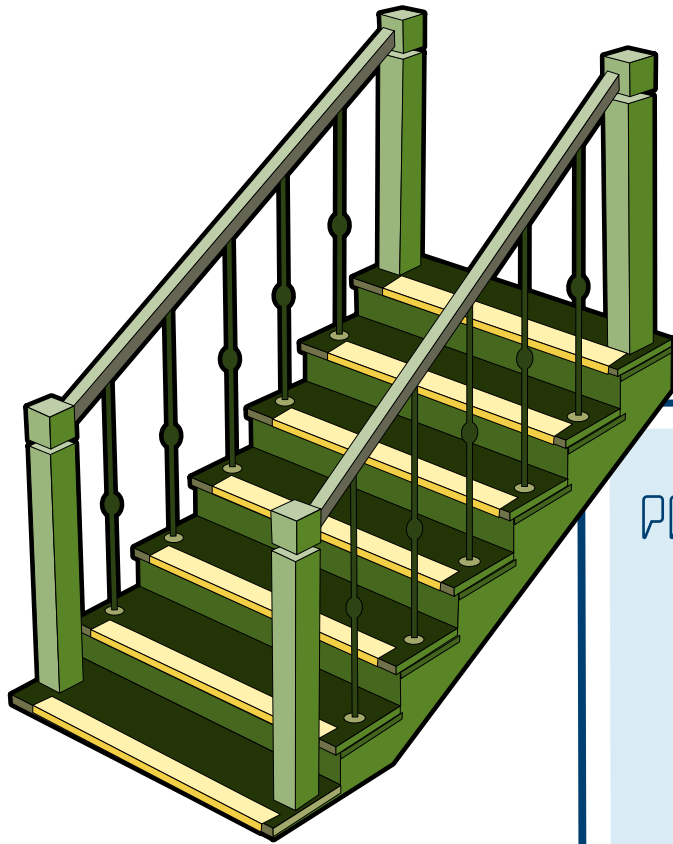


Use a cordless rechargeable electric shaver in place of a razor. A cordless shaver is safer because it will not cause an electric shock if it is dropped into water.

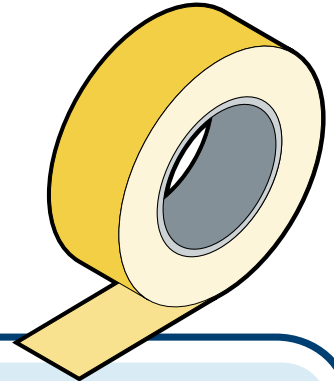
Replace shower head with a hand-held wand. Remove glass shower doors and replace them with a shower curtain on a **tension rod**.



MOVING ABOUT YOUR HOME SAFELY



Highlight step edges with **contrasting tape** to make steps more visible. Put one strip across the entire edge of each step.

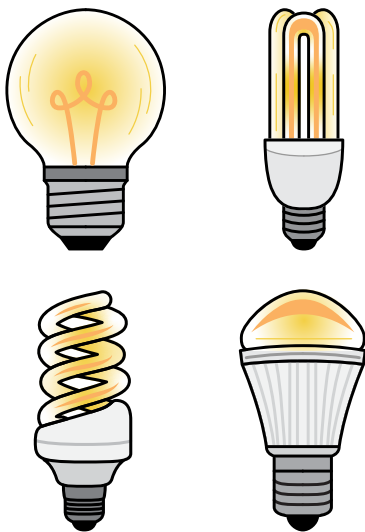


“I like the tape on the edges of the stairs, inside and outside. I found that to be an excellent suggestion and we had an extra railing put on that is marvelous.”

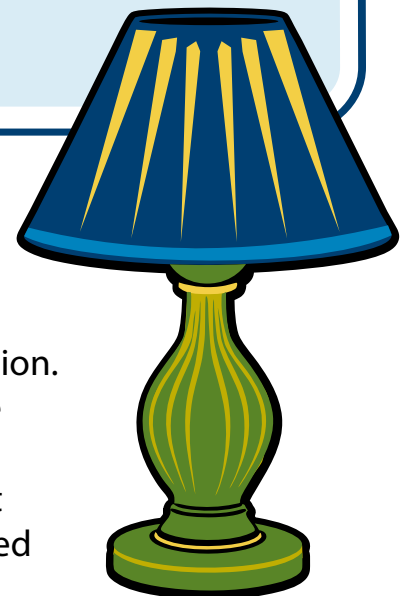
There was some white concrete paint and I thought ‘aha’, that’s perfect. I painted those stair edges and we have the railing there too. It’s a lot easier to see the stairs. I never thought of it.”

- Caregiver stories

75-150 watts



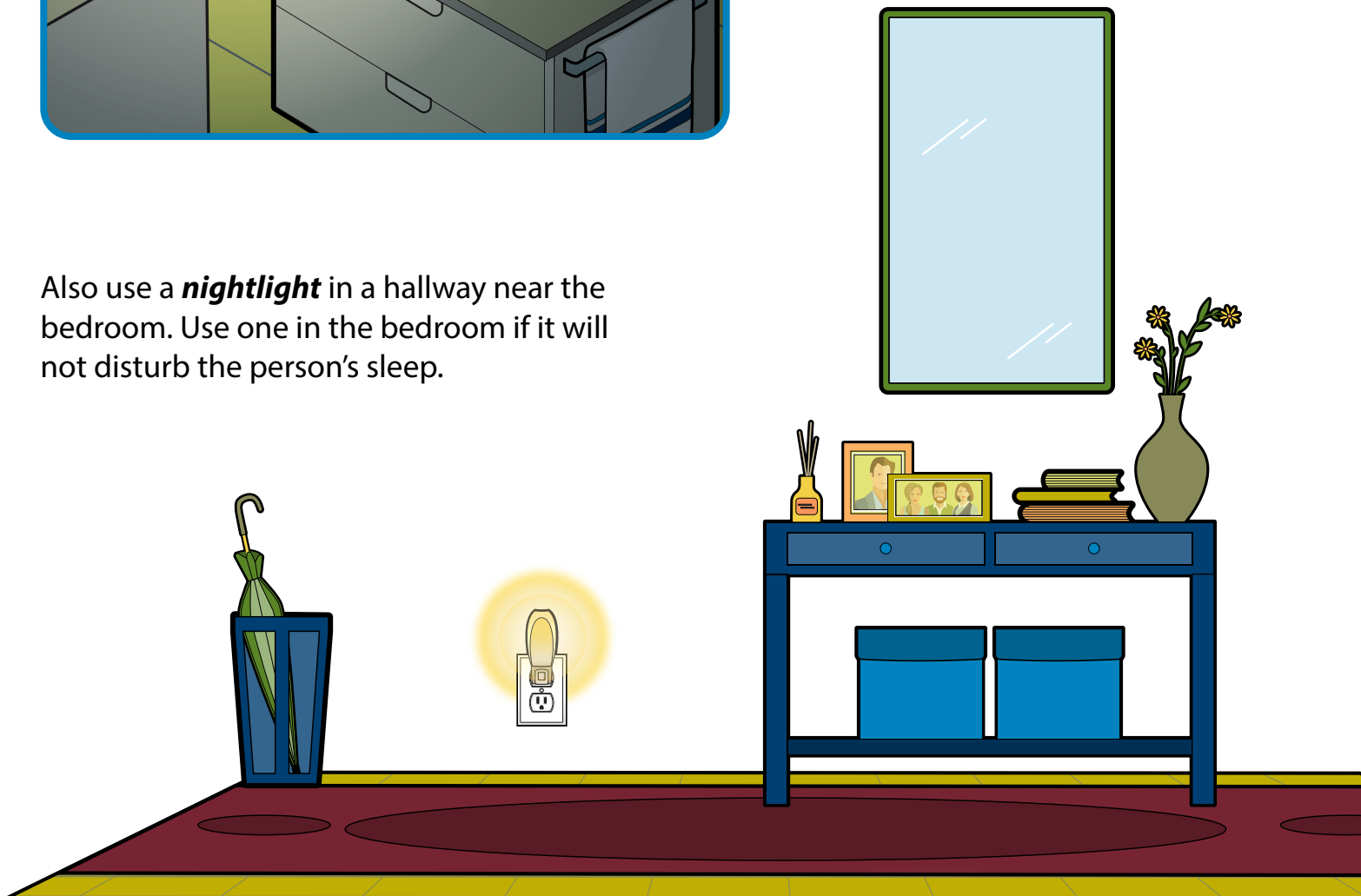
Increase the brightness of your lamps and fixtures to improve vision. Extra light also will help decrease confusion in the evening for the person with memory loss. Do not exceed the wattage recommended by the manufacturer.



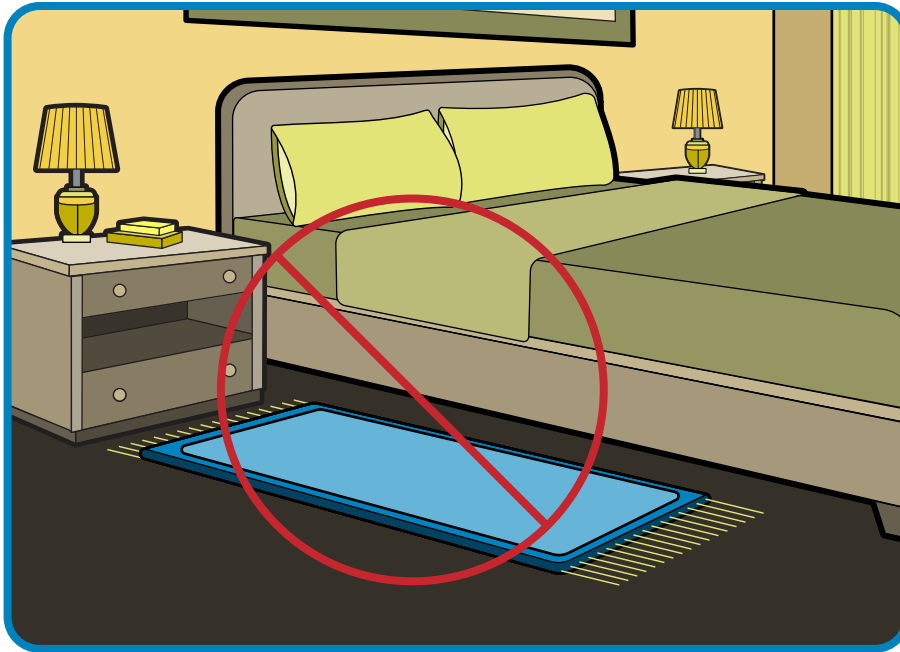


Use **nightlights** in the bathroom to guide the person at night.

Also use a **nightlight** in a hallway near the bedroom. Use one in the bedroom if it will not disturb the person's sleep.



MOVING ABOUT YOUR HOME SAFELY

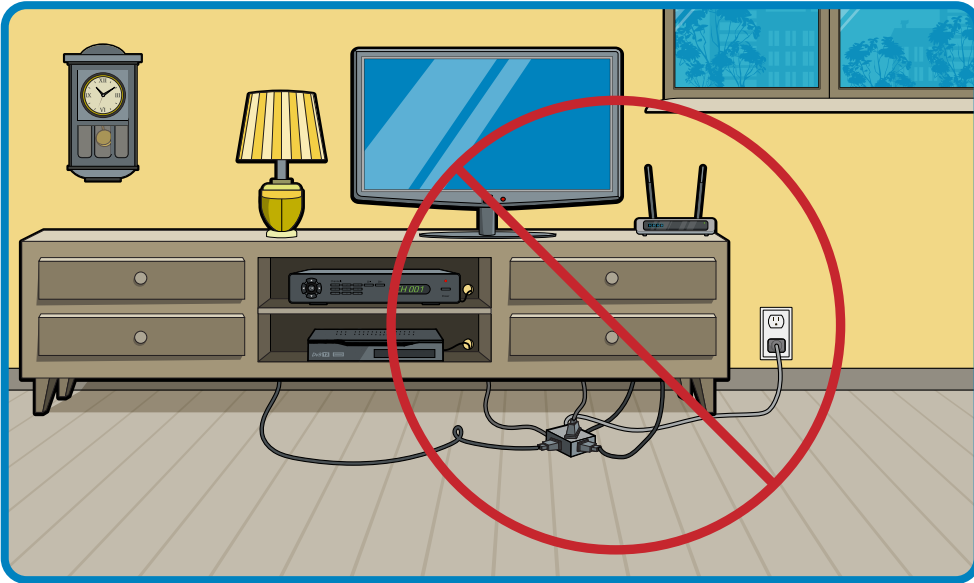


Remove scatter rugs. They may cause you to trip.

Falls are the most common cause of injuries resulting in hospital admissions among older adults.

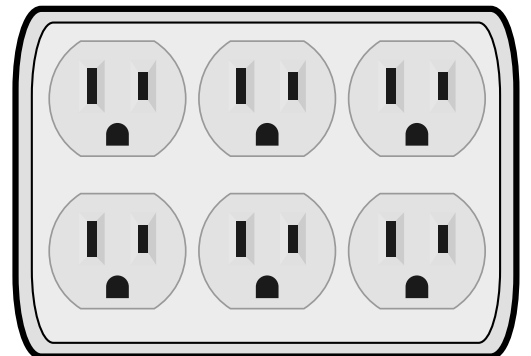
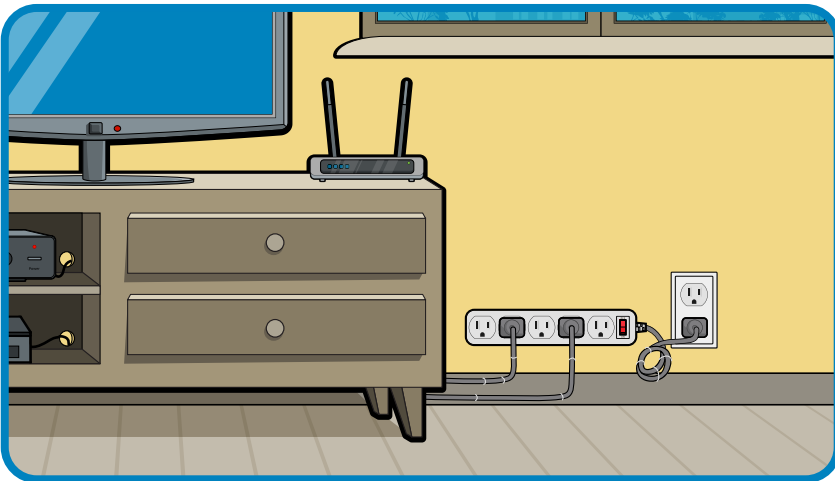


Use **nonskid rugs** in areas where water may cause you to slip such as bathrooms, kitchen, and entrances.

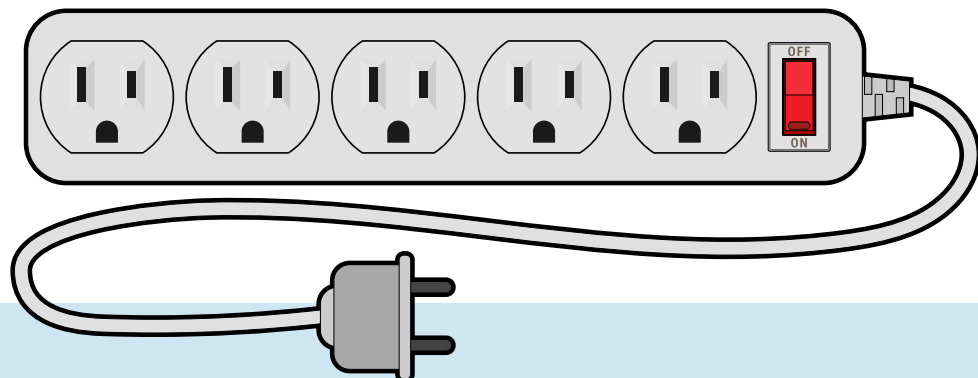


Do not use extension cords. They may cause you to trip and they are a fire hazard.

The National Fire Prevention Association warns families not to run electrical cords under carpets, across doorways or near heaters.



Use a **surge protector** to provide extra outlets. Keep cords out of the walkways.



DRIVING, SMOKING, TOOLS, AND GUNS

Help the person with memory loss become a passenger, not a driver.



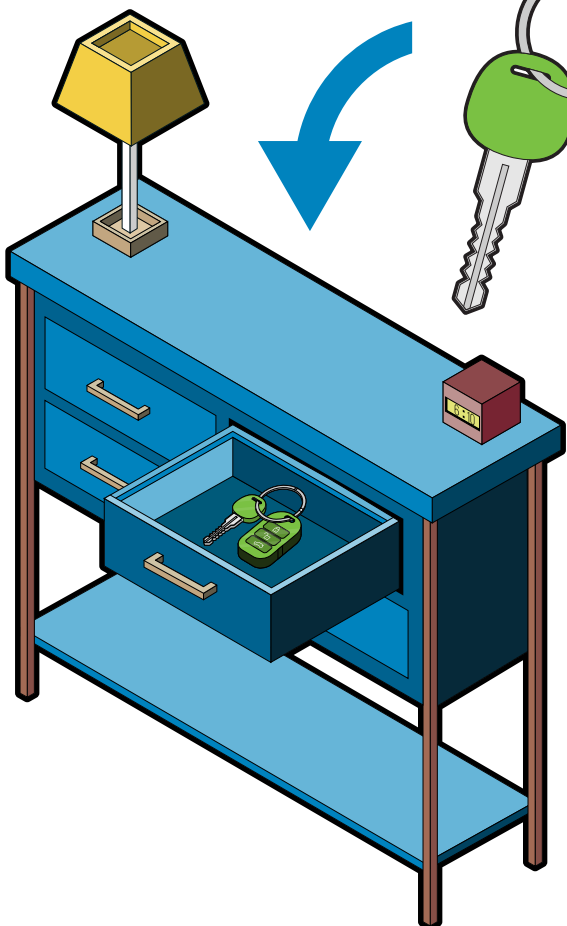
Call a taxi service or ask friends and family to drive. Don't allow the person with memory loss to drive.



Out of sight is out of mind. You have to remember that you have to hide everything. Car keys should be out of sight.

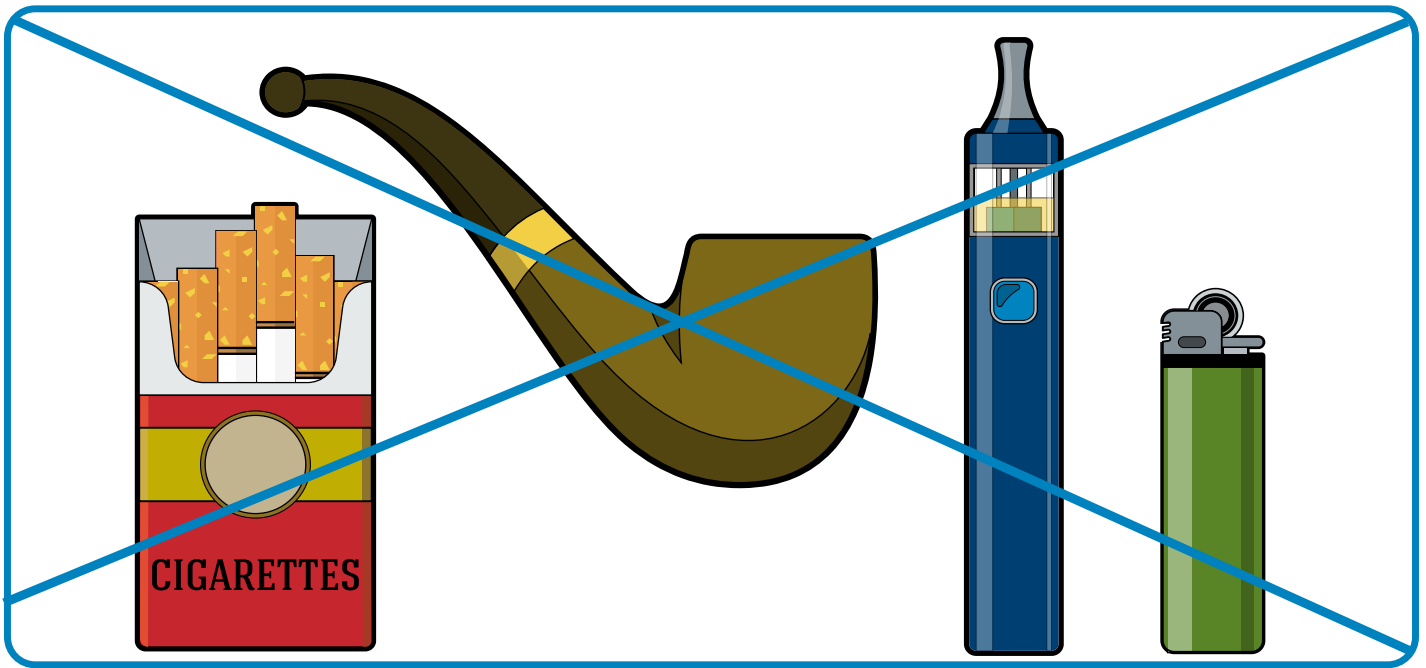


-Caregiver story



Keep the car keys out of sight; for example, place them in a drawer or a bowl on a shelf.

Seeing the keys can lead to a desire or attempt to drive even if the person with memory problems has stopped driving.



The person with memory loss should stop smoking. Remove all reminders of smoking. If the person cannot stop, they must be supervised while smoking.

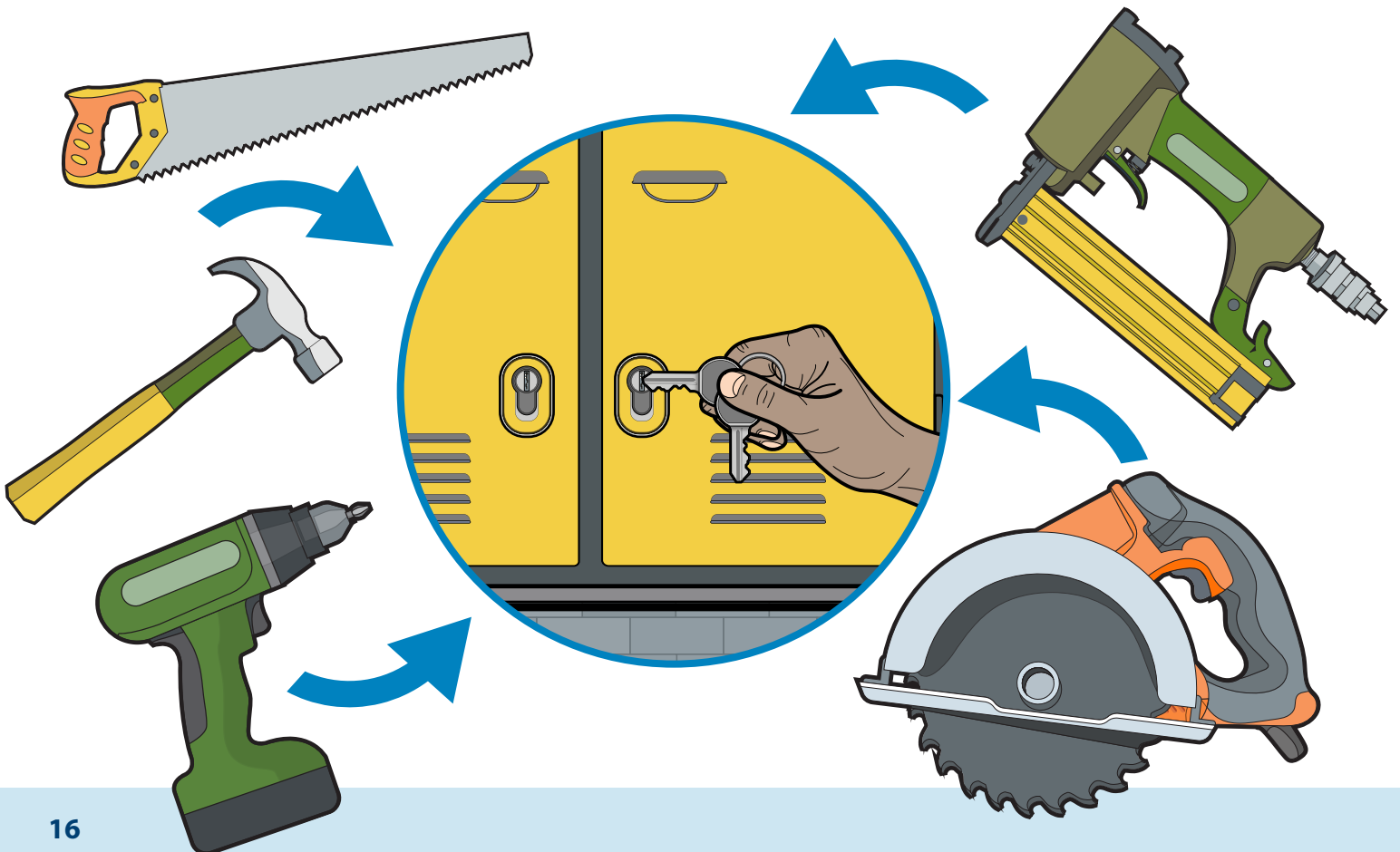
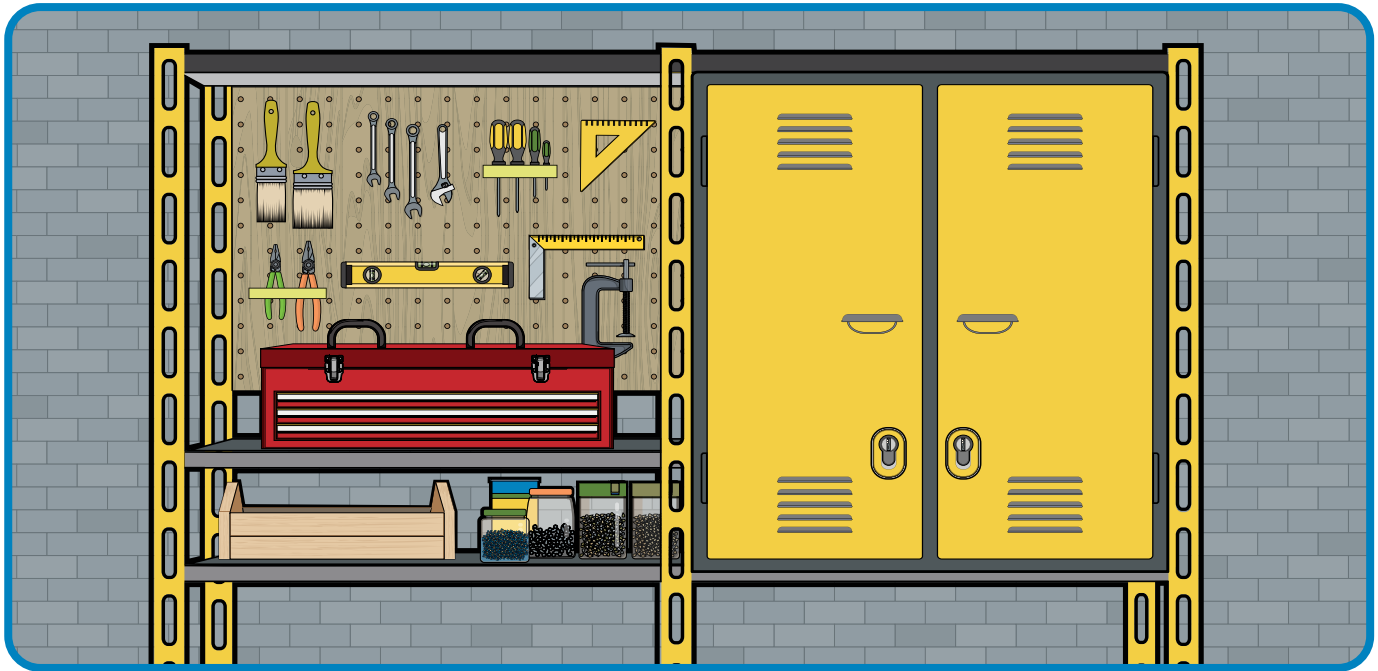
“*My husband was a pipe smoker. I would allow him to smoke. I sat at the table with him.*”

I just took the cigarettes away; threw it all out.

He knew he could smoke, but only if I sat there and lit it for him. I would handle the lighter. ”

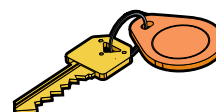
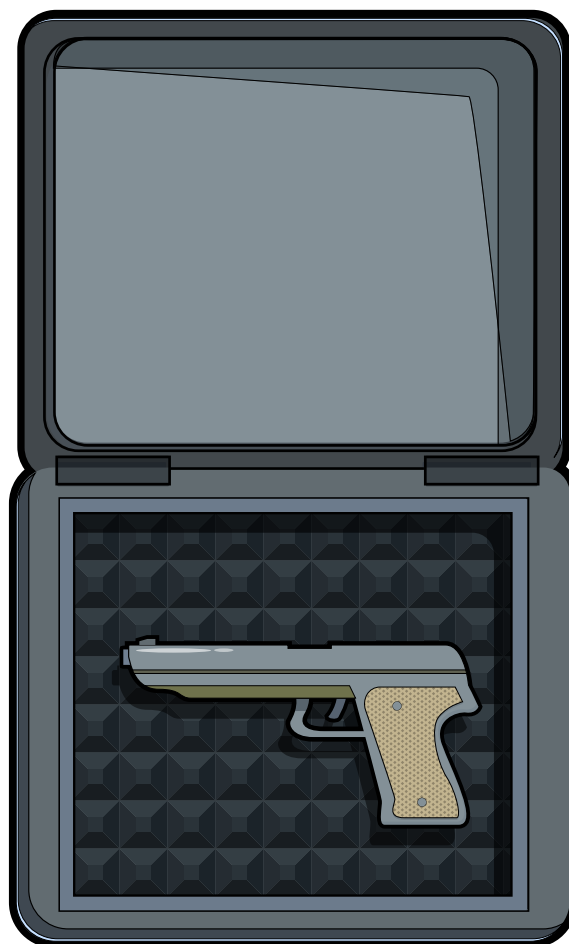
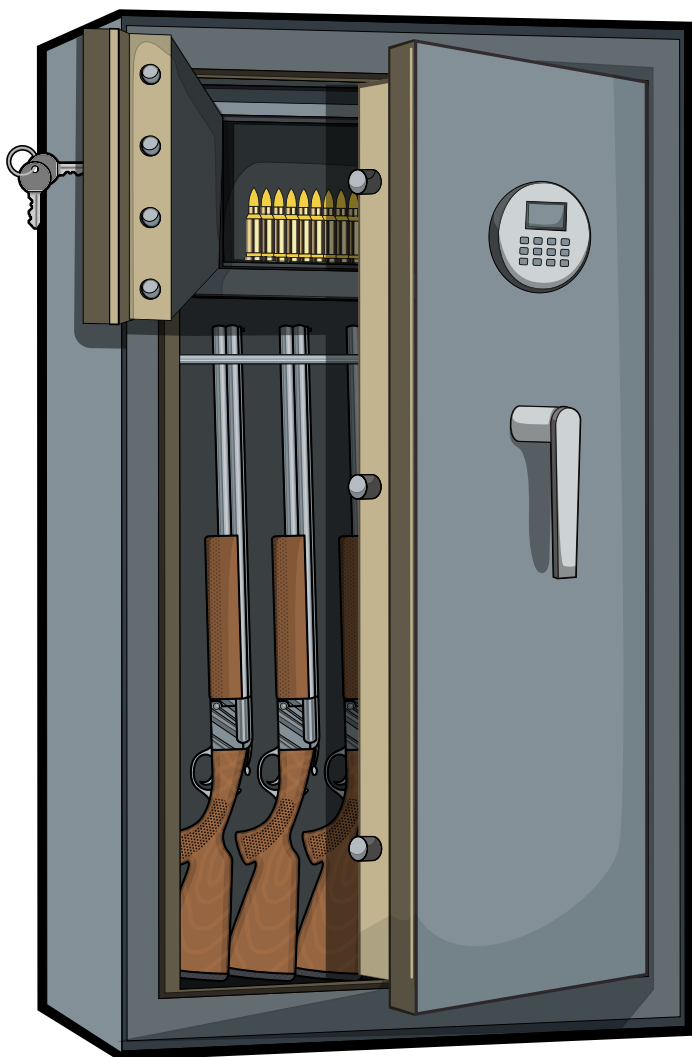
- Three Caregiver stories

Lock power tools in the basement or garage. If that is not possible, remove and disable the equipment. A tragic accident can happen in just an instant.



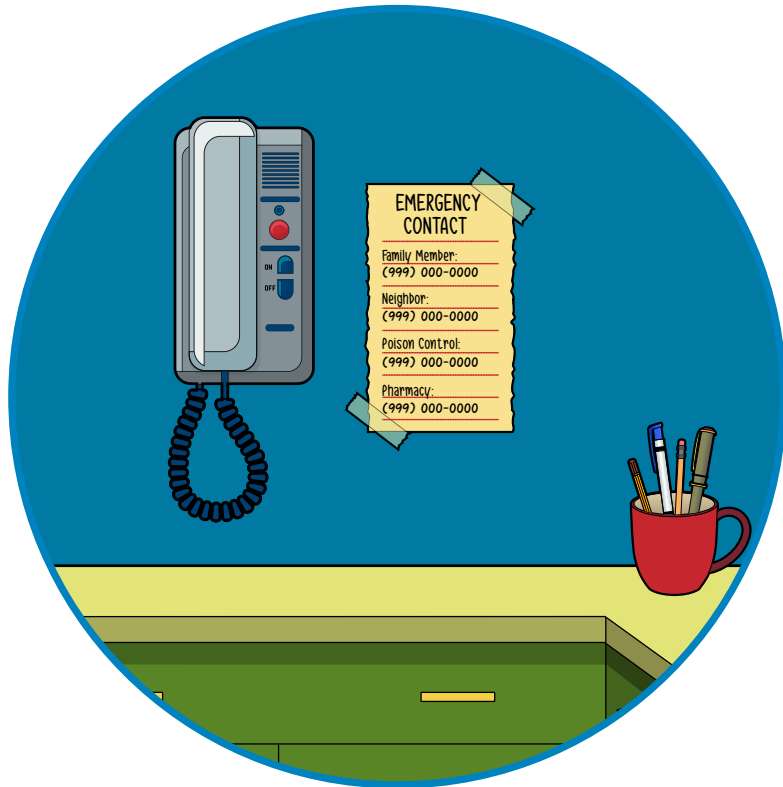
Remove all guns and firearms or store them in a locked location.

About 40 % of households in the United States have a gun. Risk of injury is greater when a household member has memory loss.

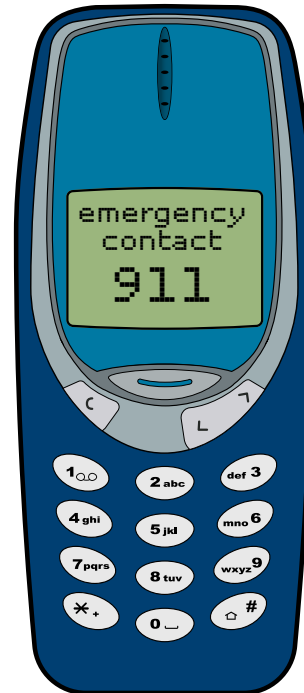


Never leave guns loaded. Consider a gun lock; it attaches to the gun to prevent it from firing. Do not keep ammunition where it can be found easily.

PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES

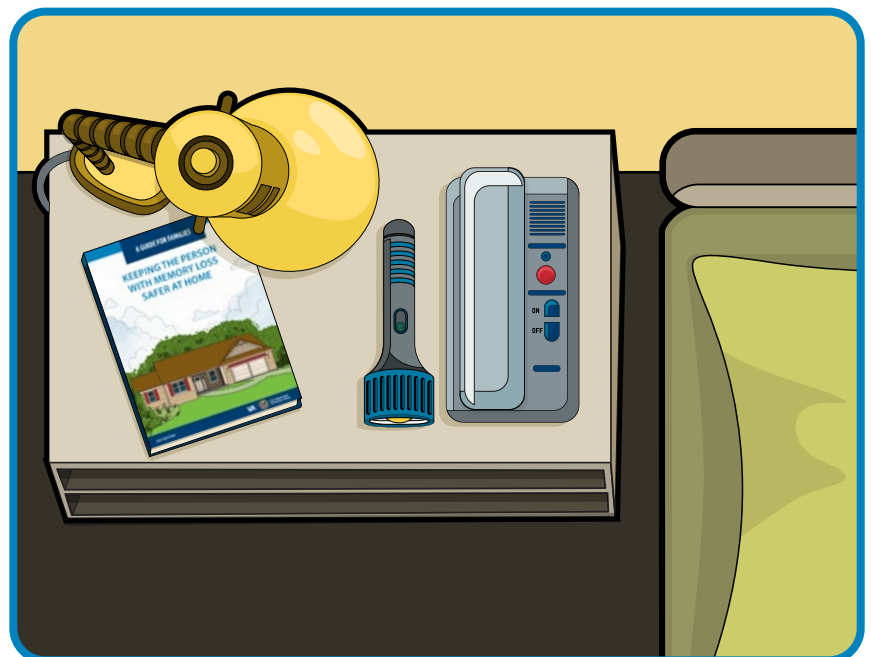


Put emergency phone numbers at every telephone. Program them into your cell phone.



“ I bought a book. It’s just for emergency numbers and his doctors. I put it in the same spot all the time. ”

-Caregiver story



Keep a telephone and **flashlight** at your bedside.

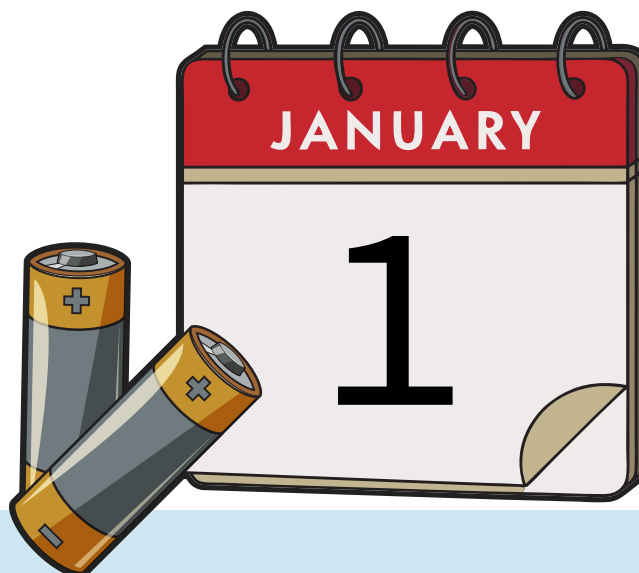


Hide a spare key outside the house in case the person gets locked inside alone. Give a spare key to a neighbor or family member.

Have an emergency exit plan for you and the person with memory loss to exit your home safely in case of fire.

Install **smoke alarms** and **carbon monoxide alarms** on each level of your home, including the basement.

Check batteries each month. Replace them when they are no longer working or at least once a year.



YOUR HOME SAFETY CHECK LIST

SAFETY FROM WANDERING AND GETTING LOST

- Send for medical ID bracelet(s)
- Give the name and a recent photo to the local police
- Tell trusted neighbors that the person might get lost
- Use a motion sensor at the exit door or door to a risky room
- Put a slide-bolt lock at the top or bottom of the exit doors
- Lock sliding glass doors with a lock or wooden dowel

MAKING THE KITCHEN SAFER

- Remove or cover stove knobs
- Reset water temperature to 110 – 120 degrees Fahrenheit
- Lock or hide medicines (including over-the-counters and herbal)
- Lock poisons (like cleaning supplies) in a cabinet or closet
- Remove knives and scissors from the counter tops
- Unplug electrical appliances
- Unplug or supervise the microwave oven

MAKING THE BATHROOM SAFER

- Install safety rails in the tub and shower
- Use non-skid appliqués or mats in the shower and tub
- Use a bench in the tub or shower
- Replace shower head with hand held shower

MAKING THE BATHROOM SAFER (CONT.)

- Remove glass shower doors and replace with a shower curtain
- Use a cordless, rechargeable electric shaver in place of a razor

MOVING ABOUT YOUR HOME SAFELY

- Highlight step edges with contrasting tape
- Increase the brightness of lamps and fixtures
- Use nightlights in the bathroom and hallways
- Remove scatter rugs
- Use nonskid rugs in the bathroom, kitchen and entrances
- Replace extension cords with surge protectors

DRIVING, SMOKING, TOOLS AND GUNS

- Help the person stop driving
- Hide the car keys
- Help the person stop smoking
- Hide all reminders of smoking
- Remove power tools or lock in the garage
- Store all firearms in a locked cabinet or closet
- Use a gun lock

PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES

- Post emergency phone numbers near every telephone
- Program emergency phone numbers into telephones

LIST OF HOME SAFETY ITEMS

WANDERING

- Slide-bolt lock
- Dowel
- Motion sensor

KITCHEN

- Stove knob covers
- Medication dispenser
- Keyed door knob
- Cabinet slide lock

BATHROOM

- Grab bars
- Washable vinyl bathmat
- Tub and shower safety treads
- Transfer bench
- Tension rod (for shower curtain)
- Hand-held shower

MOVING ABOUT YOUR HOME

- Contrasting tape
- LED night lights
- Surge protector
- Non-skid rugs

GUNS

- Gun locks

EMERGENCY PREPARATION

- Flashlight
- Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms

WHERE TO FIND HOME SAFETY ITEMS

Some items listed in this booklet may also be available through your local VA Primary Care Provider.

- Online retailers
- Hardware or home supply stores
- Pharmacies
- General merchandise
- Retail
- Discount stores
- Stores specializing in child safety supplies

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The recommendations in this workbook are based on research by scientists at the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital, Bedford, Massachusetts. Families who were given this self-paced workbook, combined with most of the home safety items listed on page 21, reported decreased levels of caregiver strain, improved their home safety, and had fewer risky behaviors (falls, wandering, stove incidents, etc.)

We wish to thank the staff of the Dementia Outpatient Clinic and the Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center (GRECC) at the Edith Nourse Rogers Veterans Hospital for their assistance. We are especially grateful to the families who generously gave their time and experience to make this project a success.

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GRAPHICS



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Illustrations by Ché Saitta-Zeltermann

RESOURCE AND SUPPORT INFORMATION

- 1) VA Caregiver Support Program: website <https://www.caregiver.va.gov/>
- 2) VA Geriatrics and Extended Care Dementia Resources website:
https://www.va.gov/GERIATRICS/pages/Alzheimers_and_Dementia_Care.asp

NOTES

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