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# **Fire and Burn Safety for Older Adults**

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# Fire and Burn Safety for Seniors



*Developed by:*  
**American Burn Association  
Burn Prevention Committee**

*Funded by:*  
**United States Fire Administration/  
Federal Emergency Management Agency**

# Fire and Burn Death and Injury

## Deaths

4,000 deaths a year  
from fire and burns



## Injuries

25,000 hospitalized in burn centers  
600,000 burn injuries receive treatment

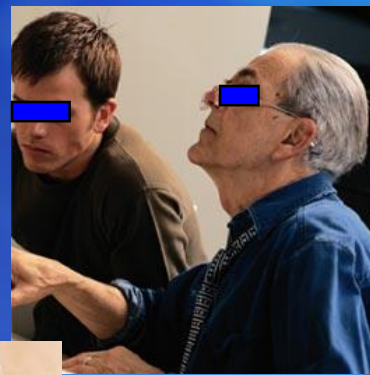
*(Sources: National Fire Protection Association,  
National Center for Health Statistics)*

# Risks to Older Adults for Fire/Burn Injury

## Physical and Mental Changes



**Mobility**



**Sight**



**Understanding**



**Medications**

# Dangerous Attitudes About Fire



***“It won’t happen to me!”***

***“I’ve been smoking all my life. Why should I stop now?”***

***“My dog would wake me if there was a fire.”***

***“We have the best fire station in town. They’d save me.”***

# Leading Causes of Fire and Burn Death and Injury for Older Adults

- **Smoking**
- **Cooking**
- **Scalds**
- **Electrical Wiring**
- **Heating**

(Sources: National Fire Protection Association;  
Centers for Disease Control)

# Smoking Hazards

- Average age of cigarette fire death: 55+
  - Careless discarding in beds, chairs, trash
  - Increases with alcohol, prescription drugs
  - Visitors, caretakers, neighbors also at risk
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- **Don't Allow Smoking in Your Home**



# Smoking and Oxygen Therapy



- Do not support the smoking habit of those who depend on portable oxygen tanks
- Smokers who depend on oxygen should leave smoking materials at home when out in public



# Keep Safe in the Kitchen

Keep safe from

- Fires
- Scald injury
- Contact burns
- Falls



# Clothing for Cooking: Protect the Hands and Body

- **Wear short sleeves or close-fitting clothes**
- **Wear apron**
- **Use heavy duty potholders to move hot pots and dishes**
- **Use oven mitts**



## Keep the Stove Top Safe



- **Keep flammables away from cooking elements**
- **When children are present**
  - Create a “kid-free zone” for three feet around stove
  - Cook with rear burners

# Keep Countertops Safe

- Don't clutter countertops
- Read and observe appliance directions
- Keep crockpots and deep fryers away from counter edge
- Keep appliance cords short or coiled
- Avoid using extension cords



## **“Stand By Your Pan!”**

- **Stay in the kitchen to fry, grill, broil or boil**
- **Stay in the home while baking or roasting**
  - **Use timer as reminder to check periodically**
- **In case of a grease fire smother with matching pan lid, not by using a fire extinguisher**
- **In case of an oven fire, turn off oven, close door and wait until oven has cooled down**

## Use Microwave Oven Safety

- **Locate microwave ovens on countertop, not mounted above stove**
- **Use only microwave-safe cookware**
- **Allow food to cool before opening oven**
- **Mix foods before serving**

## Kitchen Floor Safety

- **Choose floor surface with safety in mind**
- **Use non-slip floor mats near food preparation areas**
- **Wipe up spills immediately**
- **Be sure path is clear when carrying or serving food (pets, children, toys, etc.)**

# How to Measure Hot Water Temperature

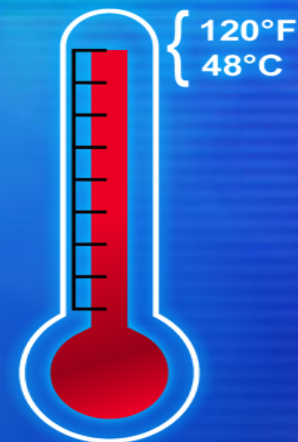
- Run hot water until it feels hot (can take a minute or two)
- Test temperature with cooking thermometer





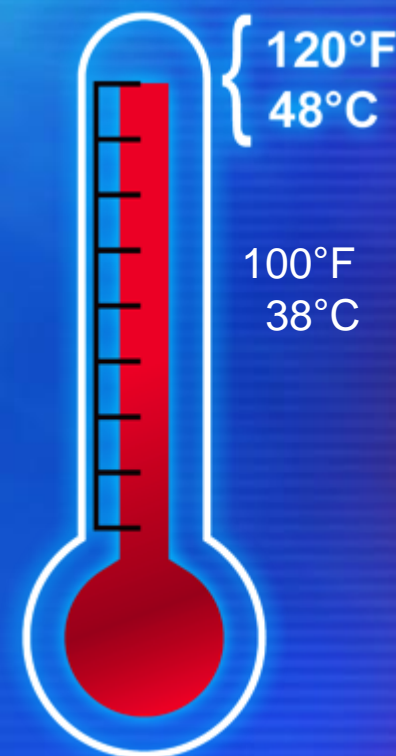
# Establishing a Safe Hot Water Temperature

- If initial test temperature is above 120°F (48°C), lower heater thermostat setting
- Initial result below 120F°/48°C may be at low end of range
- Retest over 1-2 days until water temperature remains at or below 120°F/48°C



## Set Water Heater Thermostat At Safe Level

- **120°F/48°C is a maximum level, not a target**
- **110°F/43°C maximum for seniors recommended**
- **Comfortable temperature for senior bathing: 100°F/38°C**
- **Lower setting = lower cost**



# Tap Water Scald Prevention Devices

## Direct (Scald Prevention)

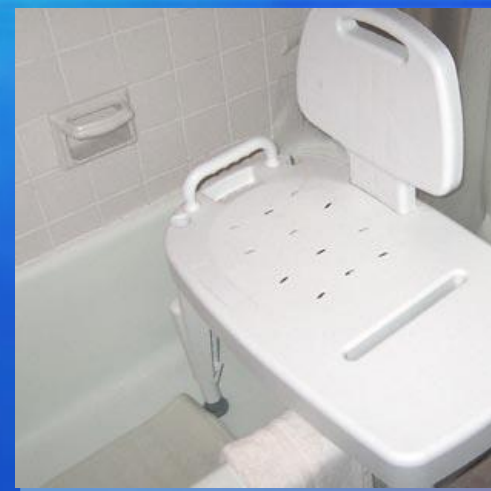
- **Tempering valve**
  - must be installed by plumber on water line
- **Anti-scald shower head**
  - can usually be installed by consumer on shower head or faucet



# Tap Water Scald Prevention Devices

## Indirect (Fall Prevention)

- Grab bars
- Shower chair
- Non-slip floor mats



## Electric Wiring Danger Signs

- **Cracked, or frayed appliance or extension cords**
- **Cords that get hot to the touch**
- **Loose or broken appliance or cord plugs**
- **Warm switch plates or outlet covers**
- **Frequent tripped circuits/blown fuses**

# Electrical Wiring Safety



- **Never overload outlets or extension cords**
- **Have electrician inspect and rewire or replace:**
  - loose appliance plugs
  - frayed or cracked cords
  - warm wall switches
  - overloaded circuits

# Sleeping Area Electrical Safety Rules

- Check electric blankets and pads periodically for charred spots or cracks in wiring
- Use heating pad only 15-20 minutes at a time
- If heating pad lacks automatic off switch, use timer to limit exposure
- Do not lie, sit on or place heavy objects on pad or blanket



## **Sleeping Area Safety Provisions**

- **Clear route for exit, rescuer entry**
- **Place next to bed for quick access to personal items (eyeglasses, telephone, flashlight, hearing aid, alarm bell)**
- **Working smoke alarm in the room**
- **Sleeping area on first floor if possible**



# Candle Safety

- Use heavy, sturdy, heat-resistant candleholders, big enough to collect wax
- Keep candles away from window coverings, other flammables, children
- Keep wick cut to  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch
- Extinguish before leaving a room or going to sleep



# Portable Heater Safety

- **Keep portable heaters clean**
- **Keep 3 feet away from combustibles**
- **Refuel kerosene heaters outside**
- **Use only special kerosene fuel cans**

# Household Heating Safety



- **Keep flammables away from the house heater, outside the residence**
- **Keep combustibles 3 feet away from heat source**
- **Do not use aerosol cleaning products nearby**
- **Service home heating systems annually**

# Aerosol and Other Cleaning Product Safety



- **Protect hands with heavy rubber gloves**
- **Store in original containers**
- **Do not combine cleaning products**
- **Keep in locked cabinet out of reach of children**

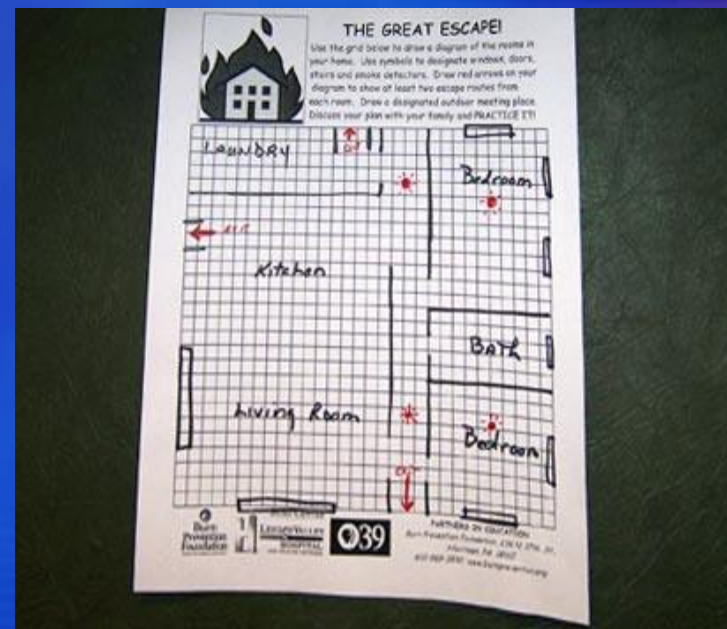
# Prepare Against Fire and Carbon Monoxide

- **Install, maintain smoke alarms**
  - on all levels of a residence
  - outside each sleeping area
  - in bedrooms if sleeping with door closed
- **Install carbon monoxide detector**
- **Test alarms on schedule**
- **Display home address outside**



# Prepare to Respond Promptly in Case of Fire

- Develop escape plan with provisions for older adult household members
- Practice escape plan
- Keep all exits clear



# In Case of Fire



- **STAY CALM**
- **Stay low under smoke**
- **Do not use an elevator!**
- **Call 9-1-1 from outside the home if possible**
- **If trapped, signal fire rescue workers**

## Key Guidelines for Older Adult Fire/Burn Safety

- **Smoking: Don't smoke when drowsy**
- **Cooking: Wear safest clothing**
- **Scalds: Set water heater thermostat to keep temperature from exceeding 120°F/38C°**
- **Home heating: Keep flammable liquids outside the household**
- **Electricity: Repair or replace damaged wires, switches, plugs, appliances**