



**SO YOU  
THINK  
YOU'RE  
SAFE AT  
HOME?**

**dti**

Department of Trade and Industry



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 **RoSPA**<sup>®</sup>

# HOW SAFE ARE YOU?

It's easy to believe that once we close the front door and are in our homes we are safe. It's easy to forget the natural caution we take out into the streets. We relax. But make no mistake, the home can be a dangerous place. Thousands of people die or are injured every year from accidents in and around the home. Many of these accidents can be avoided with a little care or thought.

This booklet contains a series of questions for you to put to yourself, and suggestions and advice which will help you spot the risks before they become dangers.

This booklet is for everyone, but if you're getting on a little, it's probably worth an extra look. As we grow older most of us feel that we are generally safety conscious. But as the process of growing older continues we have a tendency to move and react more slowly. We find ourselves more set in our habits. We become a little forgetful on occasions. These changes, happening either singly or in combination, tend to make life more risky than in our younger days.



# ON THE MOVE

## How fit are you?

These days we are encouraged to lead a full and active life for as long as possible. But few people are as fit as they were 10 years earlier. Some people hang up their squash racquet at 40; others join a keep-fit class at 60. They are, in their own way, recognising and adjusting to changing physical abilities.

## How safe are you as you move about your home?

Many home injuries are the result of bad falls. Good lighting can help. It is sensible to switch on the light rather than risk a fall even when the surroundings are familiar.

Arrange the furniture so that you can move around freely and without bumping into low items like coffee tables, stools and leg-rests. Make sure there are no trailing flexes, frayed and wrinkled rugs or carpets to trip over. And think what might happen if you fell on to a glass topped coffee table!

Remember that loading and unloading the car boot can result in a strained back. A number of small bags is easier to handle than a large box.

### **And if you're getting a little older**

Hand-rails on both sides of the staircase can be particularly helpful for those with an arm weakness.

If you wear glasses, take time to accustom yourself to a new pair, especially bi-focal glasses, particularly when going up and down stairs.

When buying shoes look for ridged rubberised soles and non-slip heels to help give you stability.

# TAKING YOUR MEDICINE

Are you careful enough with medicine?

It is important for everyone to know how to deal with medicines safely. Most of us have to take medicine at some time in our lives, whether it's for a long term illness or just the flu. If you take tablets keep them safe so no one else can take them by mistake.

With short or long-term medication, how do you rate for safety on the following points?

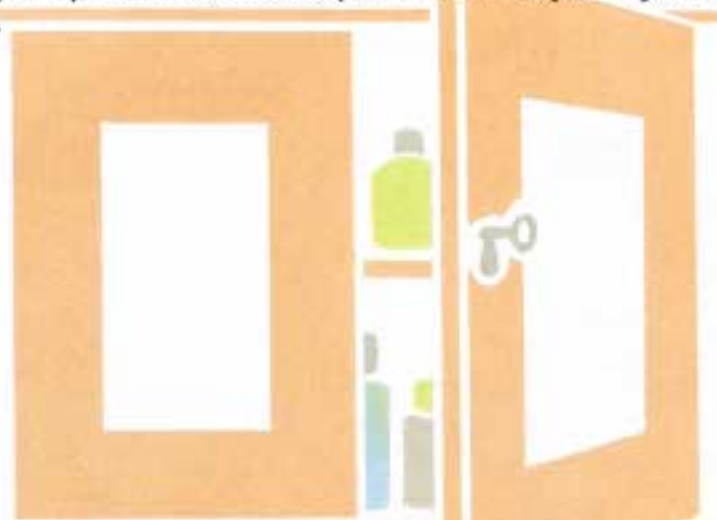


Keep your medicines in their original containers and preferably in a locked medicine cabinet.

If children are around, make sure your medicines are stored out of their sight and reach.

Return all left-over medicines to your pharmacist. Don't hoard them or give them to your friends.

Make sure you read and understand the instructions on the label. Ask your pharmacist to explain them to you if you are in any doubt.



## And if you're getting a little older

Take only the correct dose regularly as instructed. Remembering whether you have done so is sometimes difficult. In the case of pills and tablets, it can help to set out a whole day's medication in the morning. A quick count in the course of the day can reassure you that you have taken the required dose . . . or not!

This suggestion is only safe if you can be sure that there are no young children in or around the home.

If you are frustrated by child resistant closures, ask your pharmacist to dispense your medicines in bottles with ordinary screw-caps. But only if there's no danger of children finding them.




# IN THE KITCHEN

How safe is your kitchen?

The kitchen is the workshop of the home. A good workshop contains the right tools for the job and provides good working conditions.

Poor layout, old or worn equipment and a belief that spills will be wiped up 'afterwards' lead to all kinds of injuries.



How about your kitchen? How do you rate on the following points?



Plan to have sufficient work surface space beside the sink and cooker to be able to lay things down and work without risk or frustration.

Can you reach most things in everyday use easily? Don't strain to reach high shelves, or bend into low cupboards to reach heavy objects. Use drawers and carousels to store groceries, vegetables and pans. They can help to make low level storage more accessible.

Make sure electrical flexes do not trail over the edge of work surfaces where they catch as you pass, or attract the attention of children. Fit coiled flexes where possible.

A timer helps to remind you that you have left something cooking.

Wipe up spills at once; the sooner you clean them up the less risk there is of slipping on them.

All gas appliances – water heaters, central heating units, back boilers, cookers and fires – require regular servicing. Budget for this important item and do a check from time to time to make sure pilot lights have not gone out.

## And if you're getting a little older

Keep everything you need close at hand or get someone to help if you can't reach easily.

Use a tin opener which works easily and which you can operate without injuring yourself. If your grip is poor you may find it easier to use a wall-mounted or electrically operated opener.



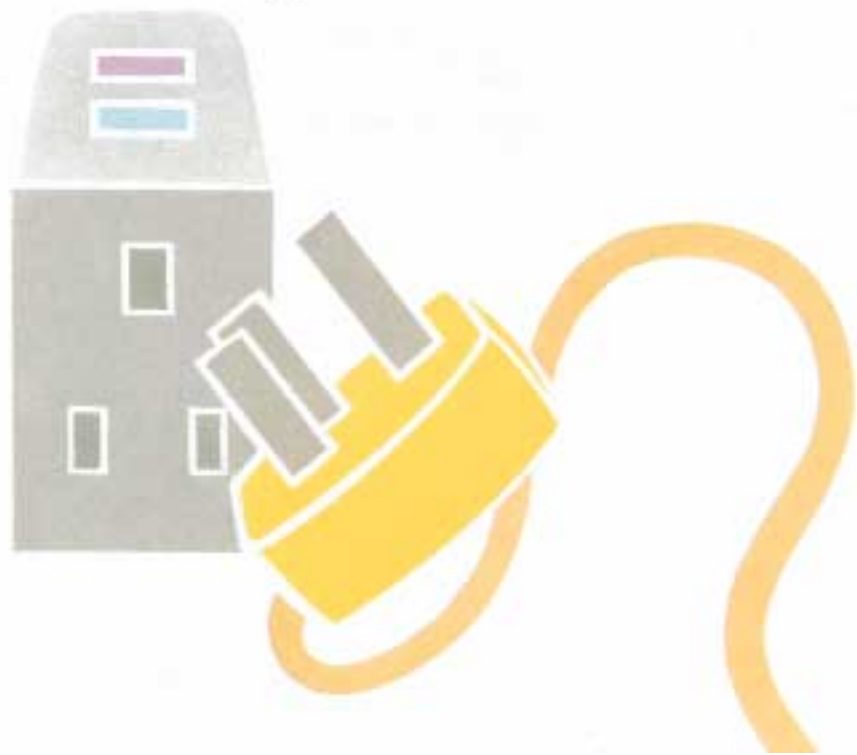
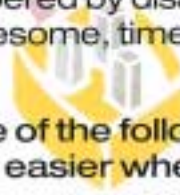
# EASY DOES IT!


Do you plan to make it easy?

A surprising amount of physical effort is involved in doing the everyday household chores. But if you are weakened by illness or hampered by disability,

even the simplest tasks can become tiresome, time consuming and often dangerous.

For the fit and the less fit, would some of the following suggestions make your life safer and easier when working around the house and garden?





Can you reach the power points in regular daily use easily, such as for the kettle, the vacuum cleaner, the T.V.? If not, have them moved to a position where you would find it easy to plug and unplug.

Take time to plan any DIY work carefully before tackling it, and make sure you have the right tools for the job.

If you have to use a ladder, stand it at a safe angle anchored at its base. Take care not to over-reach when standing on it. Too many people take unnecessary risks with ladders.

With electric power tools and lawnmowers follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully and use only from a power point fitted with a residual current device (RCD).

## And if you're getting a little older

If you have difficulty gripping a plug, consider replacing it with one which has a special grip or handle.

Remember that jobs which require you to raise your arms and tip back your head, may cause you to black out. If you feel this is a possibility, get help with cleaning windows, putting in new light bulbs or reaching higher shelves.

# TAKING A BATH

Do you take care in the bathroom?

Taking a bath seems to present few problems until something actually goes wrong – the slip while getting into or out of the bath, the towel rail that gives way when grabbed to restore balance.

Why not take a few precautions and consider installing some simple safety aids in your bathroom?



Remember to put cold water into the bath before, or at the same time as, running the hot water. It will then never be hot enough to scald you. Test temperatures very carefully before letting young children bathe.

Showers can be fitted with thermal cut-outs to prevent scalding.

Lay down fitted carpeting in the bathroom. It is safer than vinyl flooring and loose mats. People don't only slip on soap in films, make sure it doesn't happen to you.

For most people getting into a bath is easy, but does getting out create problems? If so, a rubber bath mat will help and also a well-placed grab bar or safety rail.



## And if you're getting a little older

Take special care when leaning over the wash basin to shampoo your hair. Could the effort of raising your arms when in this position cause you to feel faint? Ask someone to help you if you've ever felt like this.

Could you summon help in an emergency? Always leave the bathroom door unlocked and, if possible, arrange to have someone else in the house when you take a bath. You might also consider having a portable telephone or a personal alarm handy.

# ...AND SO TO BED

Is this place of rest safe?

It's so easy to drop off to sleep forgetting that the bedroom fire or electric underblanket has been left switched on.

It is surprising how many unsuspected hazards there are in what is regarded as a fairly safe place.

Could you be caught out when you are not fully awake?



Make sure electric fires and heaters are placed well away from bedding, furniture and curtains.

Electric blankets don't last forever. Check yours for tell-tale signs of wear and tear, such as frayed fabric, worn flex, and scorch marks, and have them serviced regularly. Remember to switch off electric underblankets before getting into bed.

Always remember young children are more sensitive to heat than us. Don't place their beds or cots near to radiators, they could get burnt.

If you waken when it's dark make sure you can reach the bedside lamp switch easily.

Untied dressing gown cords and loose sheets and blankets could trip you up. Make sure they're not trailing on the floor.

## And if you're getting a little older

Is your bed the right height? Judge for yourself. When sitting on the edge of your bed the soles of your feet should touch the floor and you should be able to stand up easily from this position.

Always take your time before standing up. Sit on the edge of the bed for a minute or so before getting to your feet. If you get up too quickly – you could feel faint.



# AND OF COURSE...

- All fires and heaters should be guarded.
- Plugs should be correctly fused and power points not overloaded with adaptors.
- Portable mains-operated electric appliances should not be taken into the bathroom.
- Smoke detectors should be installed.
- Chimneys and flues should be cleaned at least once a year.
- Where gas, solid fuel, portable gas and oil heaters are used, extra care should be taken to ensure that the room is well ventilated.
- Smokers should have plenty of deep ashtrays, and should appreciate the great dangers associated with smoking in bed.
- You should have a plan for action should fire break out in your home.
- All chemical products such as bleach, turps, caustic soda, weedkillers should be properly labelled and kept where children cannot see and reach them.

## BUT DO YOU DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT?

### USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Fire/Police/Ambulance  
(Emergency)

999

Gas Service \_\_\_\_\_

Doctor/Health Centre \_\_\_\_\_

Electricity Board \_\_\_\_\_

Hospital  
(Accident Dept) \_\_\_\_\_

Environmental  
Health Dept \_\_\_\_\_

Police (Enquiries) \_\_\_\_\_

Social Services Dept \_\_\_\_\_

Nearest Relative \_\_\_\_\_

Citizens Advice  
Bureau \_\_\_\_\_