**AARP: 30 Safety Tips for 30 Days**

**How to reduce your risk of accidental injury at home and in the garden.**

**1.     Did you know that by 2020, the Census Bureau estimates 7 to 8 million people in the U.S. will be over the age of 85, and 214,000 will be older than 100? One of the most common problems they face is living in a home that no longer matches their needs and abilities.**

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** The best approach to making homes safe and comfortable for all residents, no matter their age or ability, is to plan ahead and build or remodel homes using the principles of universal design. This means making sure homes are barrier-free by providing step-free entryways and interior doorways, wide hallways and bathrooms with enough space to accommodate wheelchairs, reachable switches and controls, easy-to –use lever door and faucet handles, and rocker panel light switches.

**2.    Did you know that many lacerations and puncture wounds occur when people use kitchen knives to open hard plastic clamshell packages? In 2004 more than 6,400 people went to the emergency room for injuries resulting from plastic packaging. Source: CPSC**

 **How to Reduce Your Risk:** Use a can opener or blunt-tipped scissors instead of a knife. The can opener will cut the plastic without cutting your hands.  There are commercial products sold specifically for opening clamshell packaging but they are not always effective. Once the package is open there still may be sharp plastic edges, so be careful.

**3.**   **Did you know the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns that canes and walkers actually cause falls when they’re not used properly? According to the study, this occurs at a rate of 129 times a day throughout the United States.**

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** Walking aids enable many people with disabilities to remain active and independent. They can reduce pain while walking or compensate for balance problems. But a walking aid should be tailored to the body and needs of the person using it. Don’t borrow a cane or walker from someone else. Get advice from your doctor or a professional physical therapist about the type of cane or walker that will be safest and most helpful for you, and get instructions on how to use it properly.

**4.    Did you know flooding can cause indoor air quality problems in your home long after floodwaters have receded?**

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** Microorganisms in floodwaters may present a health hazard. These organisms can penetrate deep into soaked, porous materials and later bereleased into air, causing illness and allergic reactions when inhaled, according to the National Safety Council. In the event of flooding follow the procedures below.

•    Remove all porous items that have been wet for more than 48 hours and cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried.  This includes carpeting, padding, upholstery, wallpaper, drywall, floor and ceiling tiles, insulation, clothing, leather, paper, wood, and food.
•    Open the doors and windows, especially if the humidity is higher inside than outside of the house. Controlling moisture levels in your home is the most critical factor in preventing mold growth.
•    Open all closets and cabinet doors to allow the air to circulate. Open drawers as soon as possible because unopened drawers may swell, making it hard to open them when they are dry.
•    When the electricity is back on, turn on fans to help air out your home.
•    Do not use the air conditioner or the furnace blower if they were under water. You might be blowing contaminants from sediments left from the excessive water.
•    Clean or hose out ventilation ducts before using the air conditioner or furnace.
•    Use a dehumidifier and/or desiccants to dry out your home.
•    If the damage is extensive, you may want to call a contractor who specializes in water extraction.

**5.    Did you know drowning is not the only common risk associatedwith swimming pools and hot tubs?  One of the biggest risks associatedwith pools, spas, and hot tubs in homes is electrocution. Faultyunderwater lighting, aging electrical wiring, sump pumps, power washersand ungrounded vacuums are among the most prevalent causes, in additionto electrical appliances and extension cords that fall into the water**. Source: CPSC

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** According to Hal Stratton of Consumer Product Safety Commission, "The best protection for families is inspection, detection, and correction of electrical hazards in and around swimming pools, hot tubs and spas. CPSC strongly encourages residential and commercial pool owners and operators to upgrade protection of the lights, receptacles, and switches with Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs). Older pools are the biggest concern, as underwater lighting fixtures may have degraded with age and may not be protected by GFCIs."

**6.    Did you know a sharp kitchen knife is safer than a dull one? The force exerted when cutting, slicing, or chopping with a dull blade often leads to slips that cause hand injuries.**

**How to Reduce Your Risk:**

•    Keep an assortment of knives with blades made of high-carbon steel on hand in the sizes and shapes best suited to routine kitchen tasks.
•    Sharpen your knives regularly with a whetstone, steel, or automatic sharpener.
•    Never store knives in an unorganized drawer.  Store sharp knives in a knife block or separated in divided drawers so that blades don’t come in contact with other metals.

**7.    Did you know deaths resulting from fires in the home are highest among people age 65+ and children under the age of five? Residential fires and burns are the third leading cause of unintentional home injury deaths and the ninth leading cause of home injuries resulting in an emergency department visit.** Source: CDC

**How to Reduce Your Risk:**

•    Install smoke detectors on every floor of your home, test them frequently, and replace their batteries once a year.
•    Make a fire escape plan and practice it with all members of your household. Make sure escape routes are clear of clutter and that doors and windows are in good working order.

For more fire safety tips, visit [www.usfa.fema.gov/50plus](http://www.usfa.fema.gov/50plus).

**8.    Did you know each year approximately 3,800 injuries and 34 deaths occur in U.S. homes due to scalding from excessively hot tap water? The majority of accidents involve the elderly and children under the age of five.**  Source: CPSC

**How to Reduce Your Risk:**

•    Adjust temperature setting of home hot water heaters to 120 degrees Fahrenheit  or lower
•    Consider installing temperature limiting, anti-scald faucets on bathtubs, showers, and lavatory sinks.

**9.    Did you know more than 86,000 people fall each year inside or in the immediate environment outside home due to a pet, according to the Center for Disease Control? Of those 10.5 percent were between the ages of 65 to 74.**

**How to Reduce Your Risk:**

•    You don’t need to hire a dog whisperer but some training would help.
•    When you’re in the kitchen, have a “no pets” policy.
•    Use a baby-gate to block kitchen entrances so there’s no tripping while holding a hot dish.
•    Don’t feed your pet while you’re cooking because it will encourage them to follow you around the kitchen.
•    Make sure your pets feeding and water dishes are out of highly traveled walkways.

**10.    Did you know cooking-related fires are the third leading cause of fire deaths and the leading cause of injuries among people 65 years of age and older?** Source: US Fire Administration

**How to Reduce Your Risk:**

•    Don’t wear loose-fitting clothing when cooking
•    Use a timer to remind yourself when to check on food that you may have in the oven.

**11.    Did you know when temperatures are high walking or gardening outdoors for only short periods can cause serious health problems?  Source:  CDC**

**How to Reduce Your Risk**: Monitor your activities and time in the sun to reduce your risk for heat-related illnesses, wear a hat to protect yourself from the sun, and drink plenty of water throughout the day to replace lost fluids.  Don’t wait until you’re thirsty to drink.

**12.    Did you know each week more than 30,000 Americans over the age of 65 are seriously injured by falling? Nearly 250 die as a result.** Source:  National Safety Council

**How to Reduce Your Risk:**

•    Make sure your footwear fits well, has a non-slip sole and is appropriate for the activity at hand.  Slippers, while comfortable, aren’t a good choice as they can stretch, become loose, and fall off, causing the wearer to fall.
•    Take steps to eliminate or fix potential hazards at home including making sure all walkways, stairs, and hallways are free of clutter, removing scatter or throw rugs, making sure all cords are out of the way, and using brighter bulbs and increasing natural light throughout the house.
•    Consider starting a regular exercise program to improve balance, coordination and lower body strength, after getting approval from your doctor. The Centers for Disease Control, a federal agency, continues to fund studies related to falls and has found some evidence indicating that the practice of Tai Chi Chuan, a Chinese martial arts discipline combining yoga and meditation, can [improve balance and prevent falls, especially among individuals 60 and older](http://www.aarpmagazine.org/health/Articles/a2003-08-20-going_steady.html).
•    Review all prescriptions and over the counter medications with your health care provider as some can contribute to the increase in falls among older adults.
•    Have your vision checked by a professional at least once a year.

**13.    Did you know, each year an average of 6,500 grill fires result in $27 million in property loss.** Source Fire Administration

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** Place your grill at least 10 feet away from your home or any building and all flammable objects, including shrubs and other plant materials.  Never use a grill in a garage, breezeway, carport, porch, or under a surface that could catch fire and never apply charcoal lighter fluid after the fire has been lit. The stream of liquid from the can could ignite  cause the can to explode.

**14.    Did you know nearly 80,000 Americans require hospital treatment from injuries caused by power lawn mowers each year? The most common injuries are caused by flying projectiles and the most common injuries requiring hospitalization were fractures of the foot.** Source: Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, online edition of the *Annals of Emergency Medicine*

**How to Reduce Your Risk:**

• Wear goggles, long pants and close-toed shoes with gripped soles when mowing
• Clear the yard of debris before mowing
• Keep everyone, especially small children, away from the yard while mowing
• People with histories of chest, back or joint pain should reconsider mowing
• Use care and wear protective gloves when servicing mower or changing blades
• Many injuries occur while lifting mower--get help if needed
• Never service the mower while it is running
• Mow only in good weather conditions--avoid mowing in high heat
• Do not use riding mower on steep hills or embankments
• Do not carry passengers on riding mowers
• Do not allow children under the age of 16 to operate riding mower
• Store lawn mowers in area with minimal traffic and not accessible to children

**15.    Did you know the suction from a pool or spa drain can be so powerful it can hold an adult underwater? According to the** [**U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission**](http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerel/prhtml08/08276.html)**, between 2002 and 2004, 15 injuries and two fatalities occurred due to missing or broken pool or spa drain covers.**

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** Pool and spa owners should consider installing a safety vacuum release system (SVRS), which detects a blocked drain and automatically shuts off the pool pump or interrupts the water circulation to prevent an entrapment. Also, each time you use the pool, make sure the drain covers are in place and are undamaged.

**16.     Did you know trying to charge non-rechargeable batteries is extremely unsafe?** Source:  CPSC

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** Many people try to save money by trying to recharge batteries that are not designed for the purpose using home-made or otherwise inappropriate charges.  This is not recommended as the batteries can explode. Don’t try it!

**17.    Did you know poison ivy is mutating in ways that make its rash-inducing oils more potent and the plants themselves more difficult to identify?**

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** Gardeners and hikers beware: According to a Duke University Study, higher levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, the condition that’s contributing to global warming, contribute to an environment in which poison ivy vines not only thrive but produce larger leaves containing greater amounts of more toxic urushiol, the oil that causes a rash in 70 percent of individuals who come in contact. The cautionary rhyme “leaves of three, let them be" isn’t so reliable anymore. Plants, which can take the form of a shrub or vine, can have more leaves in a cluster. Poison ivy leaves can range from 1 to 6 inches in length and can have smooth or serrated edges. (Visit <http://www.poison-ivy.org/> for images of typical varieties.)

•    If you’re at risk of coming in contact with poison ivy, wear long pants, socks, long-sleeved shirts and vinyl (not rubber) boots and gloves. Covering all exposed skin prior to contact with poison ivy can prevent the rash or significantly reduce reactions.
•    Remove clothing exposed to oils with gloves on and wash everything immediately.
•    Wash skin that comes in contact with poison ivy as soon as possible. Grease remover, dishwashing liquid, and rubbing alcohol have been found to be somewhat effective.
•    Over-the-counter lotions can be used to relieve itching and accelerate drying of poison ivy rashes. For severe cases, consult a doctor about steroid treatments.

**18.     Did you know each year an average of 20,000 people are treated in the hospital emergency rooms for injuries associated with garage doors?**  Source: CPSC

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** Never go near a garage door until it has stopped moving. Test your garage door monthly by putting a roll of paper towels where the door meets the pavement. The door should reverse when it hits the roll of paper towels.  If it doesn’t, disconnect the door until it is professionally serviced. Teach children and grandchildren about the dangers of garage doors and never let them operate garage doors

**19.**  **Did you know when you start, stop, or change a medication, your risk of falling rises significantly?**

**How to Reduce Your Risk**: Researchers at Johns Hopkins University studied the effect of medicine changes on the risk of falls among residents of three nursing homes during a one-year period from 2002 to 2003. The results indicate that the short-term risk of single and recurring falls is three times higher during the two days following a medication change.

While there is no sure-fire way to reduce the risk of falls as a result of medication changes, extra vigilance and care during the first 10 days after a change is advised.

**20.    Did you know that 15,500 fires annually are attributed to careless use and faulty maintenance of clothes dryers and their exhaust vents?** Source: CPSC

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** Fires can occur when lint builds up in the dryer or the exhaust duct and the flow of air is blocked. This causes excessive heat build-up. Lint buildup on the filter or within the exhaust vent can catch fire. Clean the lint screen/filter before every load and have the dryer vent duct cleaned yearly by an appliance repairperson or chimney sweep. If clothing is still damp at the end of a typical cycle or clothes are taking longer to dry, this may be a sign that the lint screen or exhaust duct is blocked.

**21.    Did you know approximately 3,000 injuries and an average of 22 deaths a year occur as a result of furniture tip-overs?** (Source: CPSC)

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** Tip-overs occur most often when children or grandchildren climb onto, fall against, or pull themselves up on furnishings such as TVs, bookcases, dressers, chests, desks, and shelf units. Check to see that furniture is stable on its own and for added security, anchor tall items with narrow bases to floors and walls.

**22.    Did you know it is possible to sustain sports injuries while playing video games?** Source: Mt. Sinai School of Medicine Department of Orthopedics

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** Sports injuries resulting from playing video games are on the rise and most are related to the upper extremities – to the shoulder, elbow and wrist.

Be mindful that sports video games can give users a real workout. Take it slow at first and warm-up and stretch as you would before any exercise and don’t overdo it. Be sure to put your hand through the controller’s wrist strap to keep from launching it at your partner and/or smashing the video screen.
 **23.    Did you know most falls in homes occur in the bathroom?**   Source:  National Safety Council

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** It’s easy to understand why so many falls occur in the bathroom. The combination of smooth, easy-to-clean surfaces and water, amplifies the hazards. The incidence of bath-related falls can be cut significantly with a few simple, inexpensive measures.

•    Install grab bars in showers, bathtubs, and near toilets.
•    Provide a transfer bench for getting in and out of bath tubs for those who may be at risk of falling when stepping over a tub wall.
•    Provide a shower chair to enable bathers to sit while bathing.
•    Apply no-slip strips to bath tub and shower floors, or provide a slip-resistant mat.
•    Provide a toilet safety frame with armrests to provide support for those who may have difficulty sitting down or getting up safely.
•    Install and always use a nightlight.
•    Secure bathroom rugs to the floor with double-sided carpet tape.
•    Wipe up any water spills on the floor right away.

For more information about creating a safer, easier-to-use bathroom, see aarp.org’s “[Bathroom Checklist](http://www.aarp.org/home-garden/home-improvement/info-05-2010/bathroom_checklist/).”

**24.    Did you know more people sustain injuries while using hand tools than power tools?** Source: CPSC

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, more people injure themselves when working with hammers and utility knives than with power saws and drills. The most common tool-related injury is striking one’s own fingers with a hammer.
When using any kind of tool, take safety precautions, and be sure to read and follow all usage directions.

**25.    Did you know bungee cords used for strapping down things to the top of a car or to truck beds can cause blindness?** Source: CPSC

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** The U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission reports an estimated 11,500 accidents involving stretch cords each year. Problems occur most often when the cords are overstretched and not hooked to a secure fitting. The most serious typical injuries are lacerations to the face and eyes. Always wear safety goggles when working with bungee cords.

**26.    Did you know an estimated 3,747 people needed hospital care for pressure-washer injuries in a single year?** Source: CPSC

**How to Reduce Your Risk:**

•    Always read the user manual before operating a pressure washer.
•    Never use a pressure washer while on a ladder.  The water’s thrust could push you off the ladder.
•    Wear a hardhat to protect your head and goggles to protect your eyes.
•    Keep water away from electrical sources.
•    Keep the work area clear of people and animals to avoid accidents.
•    Never operate a gas pressure washer inside a home or garage.

**27.    Did you know burns to the mouth account for more than half of injuries related to the use of electrical extension cords in the home?**

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** Extension cords can be dangerous if they’re faulty or frayed, but even intact cords can present a number of hazards if they’re not used properly and safely tucked away, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. Children and pets can and will chew on extension cords if they can get to them, and this can result in severe burns and even electrocution.

To reduce the risks, keep extension cords out of the reach of kids and pets, and always purchase cords that have the UL and OSHA labels on them. Further, use common sense measures to be sure the cords are in good shape, including:

•    Inspect them regularly for signs of wear and tear.
•    Replace old extension cords that are cracked or frayed.
•    Only use exterior extension cords for outside use.
•    Don't overload cords or sockets.
•    Pull the plug, not the cord, when disconnecting it from the socket
•    Only use extension cords when they're absolutely necessary, and try not to use them for long-term purposes.
•    Never put extension cords under carpeting or furniture. Faulty cords could cause a fire.

**28.     Did you know approximately 78,000 people have experienced injuries related to the use of home computers within a 13-year period?** Source: CPSC

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** Data collected through the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission’s National Electronic Injury Surveillance System show that using computers has some significant risks. They include:

•    Falls that result from tripping over computer wires or being hit by equipment dislodged in a tripping incident increased 733 percent over the study period. Head injuries were common among children.
•    Injuries to the back and neck resulting from long periods of working at a computer.
•    Eyestrain and headaches as a result of staring at a computer screen for many hours
•    Elbow, hand and wrist injuries resulting in pain, swelling, joint stiffness, weakness and numbness.
•    Set your computer on a broad, stable surface. Keep all cords secure organized and out of walking aisles.
•    Position your monitor at eye level or slightly lower. Work in a position with forearms parallel with the floor and at the same height as the keyboard. Work with your mouse as close as possible to the side of the keyboard.
•    Work in a chair that supports your spine in its natural curve. Use a lumbar support if you’re prone to lower back pain.
•    When using a mouse, try to use your whole arm rather than depending only on your wrist to perform the action.
•    When you’re not typing, put your hands down at your side and relax them
•    Improper lighting is one of the leading causes of eye strain, so be sure that your primary light is not shining either directly in your face or on your computer screen. If you find there is a glare, tilt your monitor slightly to eliminate any reflections.
•    Keep your monitor an arm’s length away and adjust the contrast and brightness of your screen.
•    Take frequent breaks to stop and look away from your screen and focus on faraway objects.

**29.    Did you know older electric power tools (those made before 1980) can present an electrocution hazard?**  Source: CPSC

**How to Reduce Your Risk**: According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, during a recent year 15 deaths were associated with old power tools.

Discard old power tools but do not give them to thrift stores or sell at a yard sale.  Old power tools were made with metal housings while newer tools are made with plastic housings to provide double-insulation against electric shock.  Older power tools also may not have proper grounding or may have frayed wires.

**30.    Did you know some popular flowers and plants are poisonous to your pets?** Source: ASPCA

**How to Reduce Your Risk:** In 2007, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) Poison Control Center responded to more than 130,000 cases of poisoned animals. Keep all plants and flowers out of reach of pets. Although the entire list of toxic greenery is long, the most common poisonous plants include lilies, oleander, chrysanthemums, tulip bulbs, and rhododendrons.