

November is Care Givers Month Improving your Home Environment for Health and Safety

People are living longer due to great advances in medicine which means that the number of adults living independently has sky rocketed. The National Association of Homecare estimates that 12 million of those people are qualified as homebound and receive home health care, though many more have private caregivers. These folks have chosen to stay in the comfort and familiar surroundings of their own home rather than venture into impersonal and costly assisted living facilities. Studies show that the elderly who recover from surgery or an illness in the stress free environment of their own home, recover more quickly. They are, also, shown to have better overall health than those who remain in a hospital or assisted living facility for lengthy periods of time.

Home health care agencies strive to deliver the best medical care possible and tailor their care to meet the patient's individual needs. Visiting AT Home Care clinicians assess the environment of their patients to make sure it is a safe and healthy environment which will promote healing. But, what happens when you don't have a home health care clinician visiting you to remind you of hazards that you may face in your own home? It is worth making a quick assessment of your house's safety quotient and what you may add to your routine to stay healthy this winter.

Infection Control –

Make sure your loved ones or caregivers do not visit you when they are ill. Even common infections can cause serious problems in an older adult.

Wash your hands diligently. Older adults have higher risks for infection because the immune system is not as strong as it once was. Your risk may also be higher if you have a chronic illness (such as diabetes), have poor nutrition or sleep problems.

Use barriers when needed. If anyone needs to be in the house and has been sick, they should wear rubber gloves when emptying the dishwasher, or cleaning, and they should **not** prepare any food for anyone else.

Germs can live in or on people, animals, water or food. They also live on surfaces such as doorknobs or counters. Take steps to prevent the spread of infections by keeping you and your home clean.

Treat all body substances as if they could be infected. Wear gloves. Wipe up any spill with disposable towels which can be thrown away. Apply a disinfectant that's right for the surface you are cleaning.

Get the recommended immunizations, such as the seasonal flu vaccine which is currently available. The H1N1 vaccine should start to become more available as we get into November.

Fire Safety. Make sure that there are working smoke alarms around the house. Test the batteries. Have a fire extinguisher handy and know how to use it. Have a check list before you go to bed to make sure oven and stove are off and fire in fireplace has burned out. Clean out your lint catcher in your clothes dryer regularly. Do not start dryer before you retire for bed.

Preventing Falls

Falls are the number one accident of the elderly. Take note of any stairs which may need railings for grasping. Place extra grips in areas where it may be helpful, such as in the bathroom or along the outside walkway. Make sure any rugs are not loose or wrinkled so they will not bunch up and cause anyone to trip.

Disaster Preparedness

Keep emergency phone numbers handy. Store an adequate supply of canned food, water and medicines. Don't forget the can opener and cleansing wipes. The recommended water supply is 1 gallon per person per day.

Be safe and healthy. Be prepared.

AT Home Care provides skilled nurses and therapists as well as home health aides and services Virginia. For more information you may call AT Home Care at 866-497-2110 or visit us at www.athomecare.com .

Various area agencies serve people 60 years of age or older. Local branches of Area Agency on Aging provide resources to the elderly. Look in the Yellow Pages of your phone book under "Social Services" for the name of the agency nearest you.

In Richmond:

Capital Area Agency on Aging
24 East Cary Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219-3796
Phone: (804) 343-3000 (Richmond area)