

SAFETY FIRST:

How to Prevent Injuries in the Home

INTRODUCTION

You may not realize it, but your home is actually filled with hazards. It's easier than you think to suffer from an injury at home. Someone could fall down the steps and break their hip. Icy front steps during the winter can result in a sprained ankle and bruises from a nasty fall. You could burn your hand while taking a baking dish out of the oven. And the list goes on.

Most of us know what to do in situations like this. Call 911 and describe the injury. Administer first aid to the best of your abilities. In fact, every home should have a first aid kit and a first aid manual just in case an emergency does happen.

But what a lot of people don't realize is that there are things that you can do to help prevent these injuries from happening in the first place. Even though an accident can happen despite your best efforts to prevent it, you can reduce the risks with some education, caution, and a few preventative measures.

Here's a list of some of the hazards in your home and outside your home to watch out for.

- Sharp objects
- Stairs, especially narrow stairs
- Ice and snow
- Cleaning supplies
- Kitchen – stove, oven, knives, etc
- Bathroom hazards
- Firearms and other weapons
- Playtime – certain toys and games
- Fireplace area

As a family, take some time to identify the hazards you are faced with. Go through with the members of your household and discuss what to do to not only prevent an accident, but how to deal with the situation if there is one.

If people understand what *could* happen, it makes them more aware of their environment so they can make better choices.

SHARP OBJECTS

If you think about it, there are a lot of sharp objects throughout the home. Each of these can cause an accident or injury because you could easily cut yourself on any of them. Even items that you think may not be a problem actually can be, such as toothpicks. Have you ever stepped on the pointy end of a toothpick with your bare foot? Not fun.

The idea is to go through the house and identify anything that is sharp. That way you can know where they are and you can make your family aware of where they are. Here are some of the items to watch out for:

- Knives
- Scissors
- Sharp Tools
- Razors
- Sharp craft knives
- Knitting needles
- Crochet hooks
- Needles
- Toothpicks
- Sharp kitchen tools
- Nails, screws, tacks, etc
- Tweezers
- Pets

If you have small children in the home, you may want to take an extra measure of protection. In this case, you may want to isolate all the sharp objects in your home to a certain place, and lock them up. Or, you can place rubber protectors at the end of sharp objects such as scissors and knives that are visible.

For example, some families have a set of knives sitting on their countertop. If you have small children in the home, make sure these knives are out of reach. You also may want to lock up your silverware drawer, any craft supplies that you may have, your tools, and anything else that can pose a risk.

If you have kids but they are older, just make them aware that they are sharp. If they are old enough to use them, teach them how to do so properly. Education can prevent a lot of injuries. Teach them how to sharpen a kitchen

knife, especially if they cook. Using a dull knife can actually increase your risk of injury.

BE CAREFUL ON THE STEPS

There is a lot that can go wrong where stairways are concerned. It is so easy to fall down them, especially if you aren't paying attention or if you twist an ankle going down. Luckily, these types of injuries are easily preventable with a little preparation and awareness.

The first thing is to make sure that you are aware of your environment. A lot of stairway accidents happen because people are distracted. They miss a step or trip on something that was located on the steps, and then they fall. If you take the steps with caution, you could easily prevent this kind of injury.

Another thing that people do on stairways that could result in an accident is take the steps too quickly. Running down the steps can be dangerous, especially if there is something on the steps or if you are wearing shoes or socks which are slippery.

If you or someone in your family is a sleepwalker, there is the danger that they may start sleepwalking in the middle of the night and misjudge where the stairs are, or forget that they even exist. In this case, it is best to install a gate or a door over the stairs and close it at night.

A gate or a door is also a good idea if you have small children, especially those who have just learned to walk or are still crawling. As children are learning about their environment, they may not be aware of the staircase. A fall could result in a serious injury for your child.

A lot of people place objects on the stairs, and then forget about them. Toys, things to bring up or downstairs, etc are some of the possible items that could be found on the stairs. It is so easy to trip on these things that they shouldn't even be on the steps in the first place. Instruct your family to remove them and not put them there in the first place.

Things that you are wearing could also cause you to trip and fall down the stairs. Things such as dangling belts, pants that are too long, long skirts, and improper footwear could all cause injury on the stairs. If you are wearing something that can be a problem, either remove it before going up or down the stairs or just exercise extra caution.

ICE AND SNOW HAZARDS

If you live in a climate that gets a lot of ice and snow, that is another thing that should be of a concern, especially if you have a lot of stairs leading to your front door, a long walkway, or a driveway that is on a hill. Slipping on the ice is never fun, but these conditions make an already existing hazard even worse.

One of the tough things about ice is that it is often hidden under the snow. So you think you could be stepping on a stable surface, when in reality, underneath the powder is something that is extremely slippery. And if you fall, you could easily break something or end up with a very large bruise.

To prevent this from happening, there are some things you can do. First, keep up with shovelling your driveway, steps, and walkways. Always make sure that you expose as much of the driveway as possible.

However, that may not be enough. You may also want to put down some salt so that it can melt the ice away. Sand is also very helpful because it can provide extra traction.

If you had an ice storm, chances are your driveway and walkway is covered in a sheet of ice. The best way to deal with this is to throw down some salt and wait until it starts to melt. Once it does, push the slush to the side with a shovel.

The best way to prevent injuries that arise from the ice and the snow is to make sure you keep everything clear and make sure you shovel and use ice and sand.

Here are the supplies you need to have on hand to prevent injury in the ice and snow:

- Shovels- plastic is best
- Sand – for traction
- Salt – helps melt the snow – use special snow-melting salt

Remember, the key to injury prevention is to keep up with snow removal. Also, don't forget to take any extra snow off your roof, especially if you got a lot of snow. The extra weight could crush the roof in. Be careful – you may want to hire someone to do it so you don't fall off the roof or a ladder.

CLEANING SUPPLIES

Every home has cleaning supplies and some of them are stronger and more harmful than others. Most of these products have warning labels on the back with general information on what to do if it gets on your skin and starts burning or if you ingest some.

However, the main idea is to prevent yourself and your family from being in that situation in the first place. Unlike home accidents such as falling down the stairs, this is one of the easiest problems to prevent.

If you have young children in the house, simply put all of the products out of reach or under lock and key. Make sure the lock is ultra secure. A lot of homes put latches on the cabinets. This is a good idea but keep in mind that some kids are very good at getting into these cabinets despite the latches. You may want to secure them even better.

One key aspect to preventing any accidents concerning household cleaners is to educate your family on what the cleaners are used for and what can happen if it gets on your skin or if you drink or eat it. A lot of times, a child will be rebellious if they know they can't get into a cabinet. However, if you tell them exactly why they can't, they may be less likely to handle these products.

Even if you've been dealing with these cleaners all your life, you could still get injured if you spill it on you, get some on your skin, touch your eye, or even accidentally get some in your mouth. Make sure you are always aware of what you are doing when you handle them. You may also want to wear gloves, protective clothing, and a face mask while using them. This will also help prevent injury.

Here is a list of some cleaning supplies to watch out for:

- Bleach
- Ammonia
- Harsh detergents
- Furniture polish
- Floor cleaner
- Harsh laundry products

If you want to completely eliminate the risk, consider using environmentally friendly cleaning products. These are often non-toxic and a lot safer for the environment and your family.

HAZARDS IN THE KITCHEN

The kitchen is filled with dangers and a lot of these accidents happen while cooking. Two of the most common are burns and cuts from knives. Some of these injuries can be quite serious.

In order to prevent accidents and injuries from happening, there are a few safety procedures you can use. If you do these, you will greatly minimize the risks.

- **Always use oven mitts and potholders**
It helps to get into the habit to always use these items when dealing with pans and baking dishes. Don't try to touch things that are hot unless your body is protected.
- **Tie your hair back**
Long hair is a hazard because it could catch on fire if you have a gas stove and simply get in the way when you are trying to cook. For example, if your hair falls in your eyes and you are trying to chop something, you could cut your finger.
- **Learn good knife skills**
Always keep your knives sharp. A dull knife can cause injury. Also, learn how to handle a knife like a pro. If you know what you are doing, you will reduce your chances of cutting yourself.
- **Always be aware of your environment**
If you tend to cook without really paying attention to what you are doing, this is setting you up for disaster. A lot of emergency room situations that happened in the kitchen occurred because the person wasn't paying attention. One wrong move and you could easily burn your hand on a hot stove or cut the tip of your finger.
- **Never leave the food alone**
A lot of people put something on the stove to cook and then leave the room. Never leave the room or the house when you are cooking something. A lot can happen in a few minutes. The pot could catch on fire, for example. If you are there, you could put the fire out immediately.

Of course, it is impossible to prevent every injury imagined in the kitchen. However, you can prevent most of them by following those steps.

BEWARE OF THE BATHROOM

A lot of people don't consider the bathroom to be a place where injury can happen. However, there are some things that can go wrong.

The number one problem in a bathroom is falling on the slippery floor or in the shower. A good way to prevent this is to put down a rubber mat in the shower that will help you keep your grip. There are also mats you can buy for the floor for when you get out.

Another problem that can be prevented is electrocution. If you are taking a bath and something like a curling iron or hair dryer falls into the bathtub while it's plugged in and you're in it, you could get electrocuted. To prevent this, simply don't leave these things by the bathtub and *always* unplug them after you use them.

Certain bathroom appliances could also cause injury, such as curling irons. Be careful not to touch the hot part of the iron to your skin or scalp. Also, don't put the hair dryer too close to your scalp or directly on the skin. This will prevent burns.

FIREARMS AND OTHER WEAPONS

Plenty of people have firearms and other weapons such as knives and swords in the home. A good amount of emergency room situations and accidental shootings originate from poor handling of these things.

In order to prevent these kinds of situations, there are two main things you can do. The first is to keep the firearms in a secure place, under lock and

key. The second is to make sure that everyone in your household understands that the weapons exist and knows not to touch them. You should also teach them basic safety techniques just in case.

The other solution, of course, is to not have these things in the house in the first place. However, that may not be an option for you.

PLAYTIME CAN BE DANGEROUS

One of the biggest causes of injury amongst children is their regular playtime. Even the most controlled situations can result in a broken arm, a sprain, cuts, or bruises.

However, it is important to note that controlling the situation can prevent a lot of injuries from occurring. Parents need to be diligent in helping their children prevent injuries. Here are some tips:

- **Supervise small children when they play**
It is easy for play to turn dangerous. Curious youngsters are apt to go where they shouldn't. They may touch a stove, climb up onto a chair and jump, fall into a pool, run out into the road, etc. If they are supervised, then you can either prevent them from doing these things, or run after them and protect or rescue them if you need to.
- **Monitor the toys they play with**
Some toys can cause injury, especially if they are playing with toys that are for a different age group. For example, young children shouldn't play with toys with really small parts because they could swallow them and choke on them.
- **Teach them about safety**
If your kids know a little something about safety they may be less apt to cause themselves harm. However, be careful of what you tell them. Sometimes stories can make a child curious and cause even more harm.
- **Set rules**
There should be rules attached to playtime. And, if they do not follow the rules, then they should get punished. Children need to understand that there is a safe way to play and an unsafe way to play. If they are playing in a way that can cause harm to themselves or others, they should get reprimanded.

Of course, it isn't always possible to prevent every possible situation. The goal is to be as watchful and aware as possible so that you can prevent any injuries from happening to your children.

Another good idea is to take a basic first aid course so you can know how to handle a situation if it does arise.

OTHER HAZARDS IN THE HOME

There are plenty of other hazards scattered throughout the home. The idea is to go through the house and identify any potential problems and try to solve them so no one gets hurt.

Go through the house with your family at least once a year and do a basic safety check. Look out for the following:

- Any exposed screws or nails that could scrape up against the skin.
- Splintered wood.
- Holes in the wall, ceiling, or floor.
- Broken smoke detector.
- Large objects such as furniture obstructing a doorway.
- Loose pieces of carpet, wood floor, tile, or linoleum.
- Broken windows.
- Sharp objects that are exposed.
- A loose brick on the outside of the house, on the walkway, or at the fireplace, if you have one.

Sometimes, injuries can happen if there are some basic home improvements that need to be made. The idea is to go through the house and determine which things need to be fixed and fix them as soon as possible. That way, no one will get hurt.

This is also a common cause of injury. It is so easy to trip or hurt yourself on a nail or piece of splintered wood. And these injuries could easily result in a broken bone or a trip to the emergency room for stitches.

CONCLUSION

Yes, it's true that you can't prevent everything. But even though that is true, it doesn't mean that you should neglect the basic rules of safety, home improvement tasks, and an idea of what to watch out for when you go through your daily life.

In order for these preventative measures to be truly effective, you need to get your whole family on board. Tell them that your goal is to make the home a little safer. Educate them on the potential hazards.

But most importantly, don't worry too much about it. Even though you can prevent a lot of things from happening with some careful planning, you can't stop everything. As long as you try, that should be enough to help you relax. If you start stressing out about the things you can't control, you won't be able to enjoy your home, your family, or your life.