

## **Safety and Security**

- My son is intrigued by and gravitates toward water. We're particularly worried about risks associated with our pool.
- I don't move fast and, when the water gets too hot or too cold, I suffer the consequences.
- I think my neighbor could stay in her own home if she just had a way to call someone in case of an emergency.
- Our Jo eats just about anything she can get hold of...soap, lotions, and bathroom products that look and smell pretty are particularly inviting!
- Dad's balance is poor and, when walking, he supports himself on random chairs, tables and other unstable things.
- I shake like everything and using some of my tools is downright dangerous.
- I don't live in the best area, but leave my door unlocked because it's too tough to finagle with keys
- I constantly leave cigarettes burning all over the house...I'm afraid I'll burn the house down one of these days.

Safety and security are critical issues for each and every person, regardless of age or the presence of a disability. Technology solutions are important for people with hidden disabilities to decrease the impact of poor equilibrium, dizziness, involuntary muscle movements, shuffling, drowsiness, and blurred vision. Numerous devices are available to create environments which limit the potential for accidents and reduce the consequences when accidents do occur.

### **Fire & Smoke Alarms**

General alarms, helpful for all populations, are reasonable precautionary devices to install in every home. Of particular interest are carbon monoxide detectors and smoke alarms that have special features such as flashing lights and bed shaker alerting mechanisms as well as the standard audible alarms. Lightweight, easy-to-use fire extinguishers should be located in critical areas of the home, such as the kitchen or garage, for easy access in case of fires. Some fire alarm systems are available which dial an emergency telephone number to summon help when the alarm is activated. Sprinkler systems, on the other hand, can be installed in homes to actually extinguish fires rather than simply alert someone to the danger. Contact local fire protection or security alarm companies to discuss these systems.

## **Water Safety**

Accidents involving water frequently challenge personal safety and cause damage to property. A number of devices may be helpful on their own or in combination with others to decrease this likelihood. Tub mats that change color when the water is too hot can be a helpful low tech tool to alert people to dangerous water temperatures. Anti-scalding valves are available for showers which replace the hot/cold mixing valves with temperature-limiting ones, preventing the water from getting too hot. Other anti-scalding devices shut off the water when it reaches a specific temperature and can be installed inexpensively in faucets and showerheads.

The **Fluid Alert** is an example of a simple and inexpensive water level measurement device that has a safety alarm which beeps when the tub or sink is about to overflow. Another type, the Water Leak Alarm, rings when the pad attached to it by a cord comes in contact with water on the floor after a sink or tub has overflowed.

## **Phones and Pagers**

Cordless phones, cellular phones, walkie-talkies and personal paging systems are portable devices which enable people to call for assistance in cases of emergency. A variety of personal pagers, such as the **Wireless Personal Pager/Locator**, allow individuals to easily and instantly summon help or attention simply by pushing a transmitter button. A receiver unit then beeps or vibrates notifying the wearer of "help needed". Sometimes simply highlighting speed dial buttons programmed with emergency phone numbers can sufficiently improve access to emergency services.

Specially designed telephones and telephone services can be of assistance. One example is the **Elcombe 501** which consists of a base station speakerphone and a miniature 2-ounce transmitter. The base station plugs into a power outlet and telephone receptacle and the transmitter can be clipped to a shirt pocket or belt buckle. Whenever the transmitter button is pressed, a signal is sent to the base station signifying that help is needed. The base station then takes over, calling the previously identified and pre-programmed respondents. These can be family members, friends, community resources or 911 operators. The base station will continue calling until it gets an answer.

## **Aids to Limit Access**

Limiting access to high-risk areas can reduce numerous safety concerns in homes and neighborhoods. The potential for accidents in pools, jacuzzis or other bodies of water can be reduced by installing protective fencing and locked gates, possibly with alarms, thereby eliminating unsupervised access to those areas. Pool guard alarms are another device option which sound an alarm if the water in a pool is disturbed, notifying someone in the immediate or even remote alarm area of a possible accident.

**Wall-mounted soap and shampoo dispensers** have been found helpful in limiting access for those who eat inappropriate materials. In many cases, cupboard and cabinet locks, electric outlet safety covers, stove or oven locks, and other child-proof devices can sufficiently limit access to potentially dangerous items. It may be necessary for some, however, to keep medicines and other harmful products in a small, lockable refrigerator.

### **Stabilizing Aids**

Increasing stabilization and supports within environments can reduce injuries. When equilibrium problems prevent individuals from regaining balance quickly or breaking falls, grab bars and hand rails can be installed as an effective and inexpensive way to reduce serious accidents. Placing grab bars in bathrooms, hallways, work areas, and along both sides of stairs also provides stabilization for people who experience dizziness, reduced coordination, and problems walking.

Improved lighting, the addition of tread grips on stairs, or actually replacing steps with ramps can reduce the likelihood of stumbling. Another option includes the use of walkers that improve safety by providing support in all environments. Some have special features such as attached seats for those who fatigue easily or baskets to carry items for those having limited strength or need quick access to emergency items such as medications or a cordless phone.

Seat lifters, such as the **Seat Assist** and **Lifter Seat** are spring-operated cushions that reduce the strength required to rise from a seated position and help maintain balance while getting out of a chair. As you start to rise, taking some of your weight off the cushion, the lifter gently rises for safe support and helps you move up and out of the chair.

### **Adaptive Utensils**

Holding cups, utensils and cigarettes can be difficult and frustrating for individuals who experience involuntary muscle movements such as tremors. A number of low tech devices can provide sufficient support to eliminate the likelihood of accidents and reduce frustration. Heavy coffee cups with large handles and wide bottoms are less likely to be tipped, spilling hot liquids. Over-sized ash trays which have sand or water added to them can reduce fire hazards. Utensils with enlarged handles are easier to use and can be purchased from numerous retail outlets and catalogs. Existing utensils can simply be modified with foam tubing or moldable putty. Hand-held writing aids, such as the **Steady Write Pen**, the **Weighted Universal Holders** and the **Writing Bird**, can provide stability, minimize uncontrolled movements, and correct shaky handwriting.

To avoid difficulties unlocking doors as a result of involuntary muscle movements, individuals may create security risks by leaving doors unlocked.

Key grips or holders make using keys easier by allowing a person to grasp the larger handle attached to keys which provides additional leverage. Other options may eliminate the need for keys entirely. Local security companies can provide information about several **key-less security locking systems** that eliminate fumbling with keys by using individually coded cards or numerical keypads.

### **Identification**

There are products and services available to decrease the potentially dangerous outcomes of wandering behaviors and disorientation. The first line of defense is to have individuals wear or carry some form of identification. Name, address and telephone labels can be sewn or ironed on clothing. Identifying information can be carried in a person's wallet or can be worn as **caregiver jewelry**. To warn of known medical conditions **medic alert bracelets** can be purchased at local pharmacies.

A **Portable Talking ID** is another form of identification which can be a lifesaver. Just record a name, address, and phone number, as well as any special needs in case of an emergency and when the button is pressed, the 20-second message plays, giving the listener all the needed critical information.

Nationwide programs like **Safe Return** are also available for a one-time registration fee. These programs register the individual and supply a bracelet or necklace with a brief statement of the need for assistance and a toll-free number. When the individual is found locally or far from home assistance is available 24 hours, every day through the number provided. When the number on the identification product is called the registrant information is accessed and listed contacts are notified.

### **Monitoring & Surveillance Devices**

Devices that monitor and alert a caregiver to an individual's activities can be instrumental in maintaining safety. A simple **Watchdog Security Alarm** is an example of a low tech device that accomplishes this. It is a sensitive electronic alarm that can be hung on the metal door knob of any non-metal door. If anyone touches the knob, an alarm is triggered. Baby monitors, wireless doorbells on the bedroom door, or motion detectors with chimes can serve as alerts for nighttime activity when a family member is sleepwalking, or wandering. Motionsensitive lights also can be installed indoors and outdoors to draw attention to wandering activities.

Devices such as the **Child Alert, Jr.** are another type of helpful electronic sentry system. It sounds an alarm if the wearer of the radio transmitter wanders or is taken past a preset distance of 15 or 30 feet. Surveillance is another option to enhance security. The **Security Camera**, for example, is an integrated video camera and microphone that lets you see and hear anywhere inside or outside your home. Using a standard TV, you can monitor activity to prevent accidents and to enhance security.

### ***Things to Make Life Safer . . . . .***

- Color code frequently used items, i.e., edibles like sugar, pudding, and cream are color coded blue; cleaning supplies are color coded red; personal care products like toothpaste, shampoo, and eye drops are color coded yellow
- Be attentive to the alerting signals family pets provide regarding visitors and emergency situations
- Replace or eliminate tools that pose risks
- Replace metal knives with plastic or rolling blades
- Attach brightly colored labels to materials that are hot, poisonous, flammable, or otherwise dangerous to identify products that are “off limits”