



Australian Government

Information for Carers

Safety at Home

Carers are usually family members or friends who provide support to children or adults who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition or who are frail aged. Carers may be parents, partners, brothers, sisters, friends or children of any age.

Carers may care for a few hours a week, or all day every day. Some carers are eligible for government benefits, while others are employed or have a private income.

Safety is an important consideration when caring – both for you and the person you care for. The ideal home provides safety for you both, and makes caring tasks easier. Some carers have to consider safety issues, which are particularly related to the needs and behaviours of the people they care for.

? How can I make sure that I can care safely at home?

Carers face many particular safety issues depending on the needs and condition of the person they care for. Always seek the advice of a professional before modifying your home, adapting or purchasing specialist equipment.

The following general guidelines may help you deal with some common problems.

If the person you care for has problems getting around:

- equipment such as rails and ramps and other home alterations may make the home safer for you both. There is a wide variety of equipment available;
- arrange furniture simply and consistently and keep the environment uncluttered; and
- remove loose rugs and seal carpet edges that may be safety hazards.

If the person you care for needs to be lifted:

- ask the health care workers you normally deal with to arrange an assessment of your circumstances. An occupational therapist, physiotherapist or community nurse will be able to work out a safe way of lifting or transferring the person you care for.

Lifting and transferring a person, for example from a chair to bed, is a complex task. Back injuries are common amongst carers.

If the person you care for is confused:

- try not to make any changes to a familiar environment unless absolutely necessary;
- consider having medications checked as this can be a common cause of confusion;
- use notice boards and reminder notes to list the things that are happening or need remembering;
- nightlights in the hallways and in the toilet may be useful to assist a person to find their way to the bathroom; and
- easy to read clocks and large calendars can be helpful reminders of the time and date.

If the person you care for is aggressive:

- make sure that all professionals involved with the person you care for know of any aggressive behaviour;
- always look to protect yourself from aggressive outbursts in advance if at all possible. Plan for safe places in the house to protect yourself or plan to leave the house if this is the safer alternative for you;
- try to have locks on at least some rooms in the house;
- as much as possible remove or hide any items in the house that could be used to hurt you. Cupboards with locks, especially in the kitchen and bathroom, can help;

- outbursts that occur in public can be especially difficult as many onlookers will not understand the situation. Try not to be affected by ill-informed comments and advice;
- look after yourself after any aggressive outburst as well as during it. Seek support from someone you trust to talk about the incident; and
- seek professional advice for ways to manage the aggression. Your GP or community nurse can advise you who to contact.

Remember that aggression can include verbal as well as physical abuse.

'At one stage I had to put a lock on my bedroom door'.

If the person you care for has memory loss:

- it is important that at all times they carry appropriate identification, including their name and address and an emergency contact number. An identity bracelet is ideal;
- some home modifications and equipment such as automatic cut offs for hot water jugs and other appliances can be helpful;
- a communication book by the phone or somewhere handy can provide a list of what's happening and who has been to visit; and
- display emergency and commonly used telephone numbers near the phone.

'My wife's wandering became a 24 hour a day worry. Her identity bracelet really helps my peace of mind'.

If the person you care for has problems with their hearing:

- ensure that hearing aids are functioning and being used effectively;
- install visual smoke detectors in the house;
- investigate other visual alerts such as alarm clocks and front door alerts; and





- install assistive listening devices such as volume controlled telephones that can be used in conjunction with hearing aids so the person you care for can contact others in an emergency.

If the person you care for has problems with their sight:

- leave all items as they were left. If something has to be moved tell the person where it has been placed;
- be especially careful when the house is being cleaned. Vacuum cords, wet floors and a mop and bucket are all potential hazards;
- shut doors completely or leave them fully open. A half open door is a hazard; and
- furniture should be replaced exactly in the position it was found to avoid accidents and aid mobility. Power points, blinds and lights should be left in the same position as they were found.

? Where do I get help?

Independent living centres display items of equipment to enable people to live more independently and provide advice on home modifications and a range of products that may assist carers.

Occupational therapists and physiotherapists can provide advice on equipment, modifications and techniques for safe lifting – ask your doctor to refer you.

Technical Aid for the Disabled (TAD) is an organisation of volunteers who will help develop individual technical aids for people with disabilities where a commercially available product is not suitable.

In some states and territories there is a service called Program of Appliances for Disabled People (PADP), a scheme which provides some equipment, aids and home modifications to help people remain in their homes.

Home maintenance schemes may be available through your local council and can help you make changes or repairs to your home so it is safer and easier for you to give care in. Your local Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre can give you more information about home maintenance schemes.

The Department of Veterans' Affairs offers several programs to help veterans and war widows and widowers.

- HomeFront is a falls and accident prevention program which offers an annual free home assessment to identify hazards in and around the home. Contact **HomeFront** on **1800 801 945***.
- The Veterans' Home Maintenance Helpline is a telephone advice and referral service to assist with property maintenance advice and referral to tradespeople. Contact the **Veterans' Home Maintenance Helpline** on **1800 801 945***.

Your nearest **Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre** can provide you with information about the range of community care and other aged care services available in your local area. They can be contacted on **1800 052 222***.

'PADP will help us do an upgrade on our existing bathroom'.

? What else can I do?

Safety checklists

Regularly go through the house and check every area for possible hazards to you and to the person you care for. Check the flooring, furnishings and the lighting, heating and cooling in each room.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kitchen | <input type="checkbox"/> Bathroom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Laundry | <input type="checkbox"/> Bedrooms |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Toilet | <input type="checkbox"/> Stairs and balconies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lounge Room | <input type="checkbox"/> Outside areas |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dining Room | <input type="checkbox"/> Garage and sheds |

Emergency care plan

An emergency care plan may be an important part of feeling safe and secure in your caring role. You may use an emergency care plan to make alternative arrangements for the person you care for. This may help you stop worrying about what would happen if you had an accident or suddenly became ill.

Emergency Care Kits are available as part of the Carer Information Pack. The kits contain emergency contact cards for you to carry in your purse or wallet and instructions and forms for making an emergency care plan.

*'I probably won't need it
but I've got the emergency respite
magnet on the fridge'.*

Security

If you are worried about the security of your home the police and organisations such as Neighbourhood Watch can provide tips about reducing the risks of break ins. Insurance companies and security companies sometimes also provide free information and advice on making your home more secure.

Fire Safety

If you care for someone with limited mobility it is vital you have early warning if fires do occur. You should plan ahead in case you need to evacuate because of a fire. Your local fire authority can help you with advice about installing smoke detectors and evacuation techniques.

Where can I get more information?

There is a lot more information for carers available on a range of topics. Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres in each state and territory provide carers with referral to services and practical written information to support them in their caring role. Contact your **Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre** on **1800 052 222***.

Alternatively, carers can use the services provided by the carer association in each state or territory. More information on these services can be found by contacting **1800 242 636***.

The **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)** can help you if you need assistance with a language other than English. TIS can be contacted on **13 14 50#**.

COMMONWEALTH RESPITE AND CARELINK CENTRE
1800 052 222*

*Free call from local phones, mobile calls at mobile rates

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