

Preventing Accidents and Injuries

(2 credits)

After completing this section you should be able to:

1. Identify the five most common accidents and guidelines to prevent them
 2. Discuss fire safety measures and explain the RACE acronym
 3. Discuss safety guidelines for the use of sharps and biohazard containers
 4. Identify personal safety tips when traveling to and from work
-

1. Identify the five most common accidents and guidelines to prevent them

Falls

The majority of accidents within a facility or a home are related to falls. Older people are more seriously injured by falls because their bones are more fragile. They also heal more slowly than younger adults. (The in-service prior to this one contains detailed information on falls and fall prevention.)

Conditions that raise the risk of falls include loss of vision, gait or balance disturbances, weakness, paralysis or partial paralysis, medications, disorientation, unsafe equipment, and unanswered call lights. Environmental factors that raise the risk of falls include clutter, throw rugs, exposed electrical cords, slippery floors, uneven floors or stairs, and poor lighting.

Follow these guidelines to guard against falls:

- Answer call lights promptly. Never wait to respond.
- Clear all walkways of clutter, throw rugs, and cords.
- Avoid waxing floors, and use non-skid mats or carpeting where appropriate.
- Immediately clean up spills on the floor.
- Mark uneven flooring or stairs with red tape to indicate a hazard.
- Improve lighting where necessary.
- Offer trips to the bathroom often.
- Respond to resident/client's request for toileting promptly.
- Have residents/clients wear non-skid shoes and make sure their shoelaces are tied.
- Make sure resident/clients' clothing fits properly and is not too long.
- Report loose hand rails immediately.
- Lock wheelchairs before helping someone into or out of them.
- Return beds to their lowest position when you have finished with care.
- Do not move furniture.

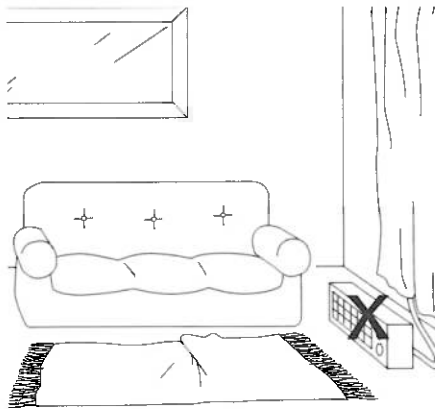
Burns/Scalds

Burns can be caused by stoves and electrical appliances, hot water or liquids, or heating devices. Small children, older adults, or people with loss of sensation due to paralysis are at greatest risk of burns. Scalds are burns caused by hot liquids. It takes five seconds or less for a serious burn to occur when the temperature of liquid is 140°F. Coffee, tea, and other hot drinks are usually served at 160°F to 180°F. These temperatures can cause almost instant burns that require surgery.

Burns are extremely painful. They can cause a resident/client's condition to deteriorate depending on the person's prior physical state of health.

Follow these guidelines to guard against burns:

- Always check water temperature with a water thermometer or on your wrist before giving a resident/client a bath or shower. Temperature should not be over 110 degrees.
- Check for proper temperature of hot water applications, such as a hot pack.
- Wrap electric heating pads inside approved covers before using on a resident/client.
- Keep space heaters away from resident/clients' beds or chairs and draperies, and never allow space heaters to be used in the bathroom.



- Report frayed electrical cords or unsafe-looking appliances immediately. Do not use them.
- Do not leave a resident/client close to a radiator or furnace.
- Use caution when serving hot beverages. Spills can cause burns. Let residents/clients know when you are about to pour or set down a hot liquid.
- Keep hot liquids away from the edges of tables.

- Make sure liquid has cooled enough before encouraging a resident/client to drink.
- Put lids on hot beverages, and make sure residents/clients are sitting down before hot drinks are served.
- Roll up sleeves and avoid loose clothing if you or a resident/client is working at the stove.
- When working in the home, check that the stove and appliances are off when you leave.
- In the home, suggest that the hot water heater be set lower than normal (it should be set at 120-130°F) to avoid burns from scalding tap water.
- If plate warmers or other equipment that produces heat are used, monitor them carefully.

Poisoning

Most homes and facilities contain many harmful substances that should not be ingested, including cleaning products, paints, medicines, toiletries, and glues. Items that would not interest or be consumed by an oriented person can be very dangerous for a confused resident/client or persons with limited vision.

Follow these guidelines to guard against poisoning:

- Lock harmful products away in separate places for confused residents/clients or residents/clients with limited vision. Do not leave cleaning products in resident/client's rooms.
- Have the number for the Poison Control Center readily available or posted by all telephones.
- Check dates of foods to ensure they are fresh.
- Make sure there is adequate ventilation when using chemical products.

- Lock up harmful products in special cabinets in homes with children.

Cuts

Cuts and scrapes can happen quickly and suddenly. Cuts typically occur in the kitchen or bathroom.

Follow these guidelines to guard against cuts:

- Keep any sharp objects, including knives, peelers, graters, food processor blades, scissors, nail clippers, or razors out of reach. Always put sharp objects away after use.
- Lock sharp objects away if a resident/client has confusion or dementia.
- If you are preparing food, cut away from yourself, use a cutting board, and keep your fingers out of the way.
- Know proper first aid for cuts.

Choking

Choking can occur when eating, drinking, or swallowing medication. People who are weak, ill, or unconscious may choke on their own saliva. A person's tongue can also become swollen and obstruct his or her airway.

Follow these guidelines to guard against choking:

- Residents and clients should eat in as upright a position as possible. Elderly residents/clients with swallowing difficulties may have a special diet, such as thickened liquids only, which are easier to swallow and control in the mouth. Never offer water to a resident/client who must have thickened liquids.
- Assist with feeding slowly. Never rush a resident/client during a meal.
- Cut food into small pieces.



- Make sure dentures are in place and fit properly.
- Be informed about any specific swallowing precautions a resident/client has.

2. Discuss fire safety measures and explain the RACE acronym

There are many potential causes of a fire in a facility or home. Some examples are:

- Careless smoking
- Frayed or damaged cords or electrical equipment
- Space heaters
- Overloaded electrical plugs and extension cords
- Oxygen use
- Careless cooking
- Flammable liquids or rags with oils on them
- Stacks of newspapers or other clutter

Follow these guidelines to guard against fire:

- Never leave smokers unattended. Discourage careless smoking and smoking in bed. If residents/clients must smoke, make sure they are in the proper

area for smoking. Check to be sure that cigarettes are extinguished. Empty ashtrays frequently. Make sure ashtrays do not contain hot ashes or hot matches before you empty them.

- Turn off space heaters when no one is around or everyone is asleep. Report frayed or damaged electrical cords and electrical equipment in need of repair immediately. Do not use this equipment.
- Roll up your or resident/clients' sleeves and avoid loose clothing when cooking or around the stove.
- Be sure there are working smoke alarms. Fire alarms and exit doors should not be blocked. If they are, report this to the nurse.



- Have fire extinguishers on hand, and know how to use them. Every facility will have a fire extinguisher. Homes should have a fire extinguisher in the kitchen.

While working in the home, remember these guidelines:

- Do not leave the dryer on when you leave the house. Lint can catch fire.
- Stay in or near the kitchen when anything is cooking or baking.

- Store potholders, dish towels, and other flammable kitchen items away from the stove.

Oxygen use poses a serious fire risk. Follow these guidelines when using oxygen:

- Post “No-Smoking” and “Oxygen in Use” signs on doors and over the bed.
- Remove any electrical equipment such as electric razors, hair dryers, radios, and televisions from the area where oxygen is being used. Tell your supervisor of any fire hazards that the resident/client does not want removed.
- Remove any flammable liquids, such as alcohol or nail polish remover, from the area. Read the label. If it says “flammable,” this means there is a high risk.
- Never allow a resident/client near any kind of open flame like a gas stove, candle, lighter or match.
- Do not use clothing or blankets made of wool, nylon or any other synthetic materials around oxygen. Synthetic means an artificial or man-made fabric.
- Remove any smoking materials from the room.
- Remind others not to smoke in the room.

In case of fire, know the location of smoke alarms. There is an acronym that will help you remember what to do. The RACE acronym outlines what to do in case of a fire.

Remove residents/clients from danger.

Activate 911.

Contain fire if possible.

Extinguish, or call the fire department to extinguish.

In addition, always follow these fire safety measures:

- Know the fire evacuation plan for any facility or home that you work in.
- Be aware of which residents/clients need one-on-one help or assistive devices.
- Remove anything blocking a window or door that could be used as a fire exit.
- Stay low in a room when trying to escape a fire.
- Block doorways to prevent smoke from entering a room.
- Use a covering over the face to reduce smoke inhalation.
- If clothing is on fire, remember to stop, drop, and roll to put out fire.
- If a door is closed, always check for heat coming from a door before opening it.
- Never get into an elevator during a fire.

3. Discuss safety guidelines for the use of sharps and biohazard containers

Sharps containers are the containers into which we place sharp objects. Used razors, needles, and other sharp objects are placed in these containers for safe and proper disposal.

Here are some guidelines to consider when handling sharps containers:

- Never touch the sharps container without wearing gloves.
- When dropping a sharp object into the container, keep your fingers above the opening at the top.
- When touching the sharps container, touch the container at the bottom only. Never place your fingers near the top opening.



- Replace the sharps container when it is $\frac{3}{4}$ full (or follow your facility policy). Ask your supervisor for information on your facility's guidelines for replacing sharps containers.
- If you must carry the container, carry it by the bottom and be sure it is closed.
- Wash your hands after throwing anything into the sharps container.

Biohazard containers are the containers into which we place anything contaminated with infectious waste. Infectious waste is blood, body fluids, and human tissue. Do not dispose of anything sharp in biohazard containers.

Follow these guidelines for using biohazard containers safely:

- Drop anything contaminated with infectious waste (blood, body fluids, or human tissue) into the biohazard container, except anything sharp.
- Always wear gloves when handling and disposing of infectious waste.
- When dropping an object into the biohazard container, keep your hands above the opening at the top.
- Dispose of gloves and wash your hands immediately after throwing anything into the biohazard container.



4. Identify personal safety tips when traveling to and from work

Personal safety is something everyone should be concerned about. All activities have some risk. It is useful to assess the risks involved and take precautions that increase your safety. When traveling to and from work, the best thing to do is to be aware.

Follow these safety guidelines to help avoid trouble:

- Park in well-lit areas, as close as possible to the facility or home where you are working.
- Leave valuables at home. If possible, do not take your purse with you. If you must take it, carry only what is absolutely necessary and hold your purse or bag tightly when walking to and from your work site.
- Lock doors, both when driving and when you leave your car. Do not leave any valuables in your car.
- Walk purposefully and confidently. Look as though you know where you are going.

- Carry a whistle so you can make a loud noise to startle an attacker and get help.
- Carry your keys in your hand to unlock your car as soon as you arrive.
- Do not sit in your car, even with the doors locked. Drive away as soon as you reach your car.
- Try to avoid unsafe areas after dark.
- Ask for an escort or another care provider, if available, to walk with you to your car or a bus.

If working in home care, follow these additional tips:

- If you are concerned about your safety in a particular area, leave the area immediately and contact your supervisor.
- Do not approach a home where strangers are hanging around. Go to the nearest phone in a safe area and contact your supervisor.
- Call your client before you visit so they know approximately when to expect you.
- Never enter a vacant home.
- Be sure someone knows your schedule. Call the office at the end of your work day.