



# Safety Begins at Home

## ...in the Bathroom

The bathroom is filled with potential hazards because of the presence of water that makes surfaces slippery. Additionally, medications are often stored in the bathroom. Avoid poisoning by keeping over-the-counter medications and supplements in closed original containers out of reach of children. If a family member has mobility limitations, getting in and out of the bathtub or using the toilet can lead to a fall when proper support is not available. Inadequate lighting can lead to falls or even medication errors. If appropriate water temperature is not maintained, contact with hot water can contribute to burns.

### Provide Good Lighting

Inadequate lighting in the bathroom makes personal care tasks more difficult. A poorly lit room can contribute to falls and errors in reading medication labels. Improve the lighting in your bathroom by making some simple changes.

- Keep a flashlight by the bedside to light the way to the bathroom.
- Install night lights that automatically turn on as the room darkens.
- Use the maximum wattage bulb that the fixture will safely accommodate.
- Avoid glare by using soft white bulbs.
- Consider using a glow-in-the-dark door knob cover.
- Install illuminating wall switches or switch plates.
- Store bathroom chemicals and medicines in original containers out of reach of children.



Water at 140° F can burn skin in as little as 5 seconds.

### Avoid Slips, Trips and Falls

The bathroom is filled with hard surfaces that can be dangerous. These surfaces can become very slippery when wet and soapy, creating a safety hazard. Falls in the bathroom are quite common. Minimize the risk of falling by making safety modifications in the bathroom.

- Install grab bars to hold onto when getting into and out of the bathtub or shower, or off of the toilet.
- If you have difficulty getting on and off the toilet, use an elevated toilet seat or higher toilet.
- Purchase a bath chair or bench to eliminate climbing in and out of the tub.
- Install a wall mounted seat or waterproof bath seat if you have difficulty with prolonged standing in the shower.
- Purchase a showerhead that allows you to remove it from the mount (hand held showerhead).
- Use a bathtub sidewall cushion to soften the hard tub edge and provide a non-slip surface.



## Avoid slips, trips and falls (continued)

- ➔ Pad the faucet with a faucet cushion.
- ➔ Use a non-slip mat or adhesive safety strips inside the bathtub and shower.
- ➔ Use shower curtain liners made from heavy plastic.
- ➔ Keep soap and shampoo at eye level within reach.
- ➔ Avoid using bath oils in the bathtub.
- ➔ Wear non-slip footwear in the bathroom.
- ➔ Use non-slip rugs and mats to catch drips while bathing.
- ➔ Store and use all electrical appliances, such as shavers and hair dryers, safely away from the sink.
- ➔ Do not use portable electric space heaters in the bathroom.
- ➔ Allow water to empty out of tub/shower before exiting.



## Protect Yourself from Burns

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, nearly 3,800 injuries and over 30 deaths occur in the home each year due to hot water burns. Most burns can be prevented if the water is a safe temperature. Check your water by:

- ➔ Knowing how hot your tap water is. Test the temperature with a bath or candy thermometer.
- ➔ Lowering the temperature of your hot water heater. The suggested setting is 120° F or a medium setting.
- ➔ Turning the cold water in the bathtub on first and then mixing in warmer water until the temperature reaches around 100° F.
- ➔ Testing the bathwater before getting into the bathtub. Place your whole hand in the water and move it around the tub to check for hot spots.
- ➔ Installing an anti-scald device, pressure balancer, or temperature limiter. This device quickly reduces the flow of water to a trickle when hot tap water reaches an unsafe temperature. It can be placed in existing tub spouts, hand showers, and showerheads. Learn more at [www.h2otstop.com](http://www.h2otstop.com).

### References:

Guerette, P., Nakai, R., Verran, A., Somerville, N. (1992). Safety begins at home: A practical guide for professionals, older adults and their families. Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, University of Southern California.

Home Safety Council (2009). [www.MySafeHome.org](http://www.MySafeHome.org).

CDC Staff (2008). Preventing Falls: How to develop community-based fall prevention programs for older adults. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Atlanta, GA.

### Reviewers:

**Sarah Kirby, Ph.D.**; North Carolina State University  
**Mary Lou Vergara, MSW, M.Div.**; Atlanta Area Agency on Aging  
**Anne Sweaney, Ph.D.**; University of Georgia

**Janet Valente, Ed.D.**, Public Service Associate, UGA Extension  
**Pamela R. Turner, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor and Extension Housing Specialist

**HACE-E-79-1**

**Reviewed January 2014**

The University of Georgia and Ft. Valley State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and counties of the state cooperating. Cooperative Extension, the University of Georgia Colleges of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and Family and Consumer Sciences, offers educational programs, assistance and materials to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, age, gender or disability.

**An Equal Opportunity Employer/Affirmative Action Organization | Committed to a Diverse Work Force**

