

## Safety Issues

### *Helpful tips*

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*When I came home from the hospital, there were a million and one changes that needed to be made. I thought a lot about emergencies – making sure I could get to the phone, that I had a home escape plan with a clear path to get out, and that my windows and doors were secure. My brother-in-law installed a ramp, put in some lights around the house, trimmed the bushes, and installed a peephole that I could see out of.*

*~ Patient Advisor*

## Home Safety

Home safety and security include:

- Making your home accessible for entry and exit in case of emergency
- Knowing what to do in different types of emergencies
- Keeping yourself and your valuables safe

It will help to take a look at home and personal safety issues from a



*For your safety, apply for a handicapped-parking permit.*

new perspective. Ask your friends, family, caregivers, and advocate(s) to help you do a full review of your home and make suggestions and changes as needed.

### **Tips**

- Check your home for safety hazards. Some things may have been a problem for a while, or they may only be a problem now that your health status has changed. And, there may be new risks if you are now using a wheelchair.
- Throw rugs are very slippery and can increase your risk for falling. For your safety, remove them from your home.
- Your home may need to be remodeled and safety features added. The changes to make and equipment you need depend on your situation. Ask your therapists about equipment or modifications that are likely to work well for your situation.
- Do some research on how to work with remodeling contractors. This is an area of business that receives a large number of consumer complaints. Perhaps a knowledgeable and trusted friend can manage your remodeling projects.
- Have a cordless or cell phone, or other communication device on hand in case of emergencies. And, at least 1 phone in your home should work if the power goes out.
- Keep your important phone numbers handy. If you can, program them into your phone.
- If you have caller identification (caller ID), always check it before answering your phone.
- Install a peephole in your door at a level you can use. If someone knocks at your door, look through the peephole to see who it is before you open the door, and before you say anything to them. You may decide you don't want to let the visitor know you're home. It's up to you.
- If someone you are not expecting comes to the door, you do not have to let that person in, not even a uniformed police officer. It's OK to call a company or the police department to make sure they have sent someone to your home.

- If you have caregivers, make sure they know and follow your safety guidelines.
- Keep your valuables locked away, with a trusted person, or in a safe deposit box.
- Keep your car in good running condition, and always keep your gas tank at least half full.
- Apply for a handicapped-parking permit. These spaces tend to be in well-lit areas close to the entrance of your home, work, or other places you may go.



*Make sure your smoke detectors and fire extinguishers are in good working order.*

## **Fire Safety**

- Call your local fire department and:
  - Tell them your name, address, and special needs.
  - Ask them to help you do a home fire safety inspection and develop a fire escape plan. Once your plan is worked out, be sure to practice making an escape.
- Change the batteries in your smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors every 6 months.
- Put fire extinguishers where you need them and where you can reach them. Make sure you know how to use them.
- Visit the U.S. Fire Administration website to learn more about fire safety for people with disabilities:  
[www.usfa.dhs.gov/citizens/disability](http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/citizens/disability).

## **Personal Safety**

- Call your local police department and tell them about your living situation, especially if you live alone, even if you have an attendant. Information they will keep on file includes:
  - Phone numbers for a relative, friend, or neighbor to call in case of an emergency.
  - Information about your medical condition and ability level.
  - Contact information for the person who has a spare key to your home.

- Schedule a time for a police officer come to your home to do a security inspection. The officer will inspect your property, including your locks, lighting, windows, doors, and yard, and then offer safety advice and suggestions as needed.
- Your neighbors can be a great help in many situations. For example, they can stay aware of your routines and keep a list of your emergency contacts to call if they become concerned. Also, a trusted neighbor can keep a spare set of keys for you.
- If you have a caregiver, be sure they have a list of your critical personal information, medical information, and emergency contacts. Your caregiver needs to know where to find:
  - Fire extinguishers and smoke alarms
  - First aid supplies
  - Water shut-off valve
  - Electrical breaker box
  - Your emergency exit plan

Your caregiver should follow your safety rules and keep your information confidential, especially if you live alone.

- If you are having problems with your caregiver, or are concerned about your safety in other ways, create a code word you can use to let a trusted person know when you need help. For example, if your code word is PEACHY, you could call the trusted friend and say, “I feel PEACHY today!” This signals your friend to help in whatever ways you have agreed upon.
- Your local police department may be able to provide more ideas and resources.
- Consider taking a personal safety course.

## **Personal Emergency Response Systems**

A *personal emergency response system* (PERS) is a device that you can use to call for help in an emergency. There are many different types. Some are activated by pushing a button, flipping a switch, or “sipping or puffing” (inhaling or exhaling).

It is very important to have a PERS if you will be alone in your home and may need outside emergency help at some point. Many disabled people find that these systems allow them more independence in the home and that they are a great comfort.

Most emergency systems:

- Monitor 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Have waterproof buttons.
- Offer warranties with no charges for service, parts, or labor.
- Have switches for battery operation during power outages.
- Use a phone jack or electrical outlet.

### **Companies That Provide PERS Services**

Here are some companies that provide PERS services. This listing does not mean UWMC endorses these products.

**Vital-Link:** 800-752-5522 (toll-free), [www.Vlink.org](http://www.Vlink.org)

- Runs off a battery for about 16 hours if power goes out
- Strobe light option for people who are deaf or hearing-impaired
- Puff transmitter option for people who cannot use their hands or arms

**Life Alert:** 800-360-0329 (toll-free), [www.lifealert.com](http://www.lifealert.com)

- Pressing a button on a pendant or wrist band calls a dispatcher, who can send paramedics or police right away.

**Pioneer Emergency Bodyguard:** 800-274-8274 (toll-free), [www.pioneeremergency.com](http://www.pioneeremergency.com)

- Runs off a battery for 12 hours, then sends a low-battery signal to the monitoring center
- Operates within 200 feet from base unit
- Offers a risk-free 30-day trial

**LifeLink Systems:** 877-837-0779 (toll-free),  
[www.callforassistance.com](http://www.callforassistance.com)

- Unit is bought (no monthly fee).
- When activated, unit calls your choice of friends, family, or 9-1-1, not a monitoring agency.
- Can choose up to 8 emergency numbers to be called.
- Uses 9-volt batteries as backup in case of a power outage.

## **Internet Resources**

- **Disability Resources** provides information to help the disabled live independently: [www.disabilityresources.org](http://www.disabilityresources.org).
- **National Patient Safety Foundation** provides information about safety topics: [www.npsf.org](http://www.npsf.org).
- **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)** provides information for emergencies for individuals with functional or access needs: [www.fema.gov/office-disability-integration-coordination](http://www.fema.gov/office-disability-integration-coordination).

## **Questions?**

Your questions are important. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or other health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

While you are a patient on Inpatient Rehab, call:  
206-598-4800

After discharge, call your primary care provider or UWMC's Rehabilitation Clinic: 206-598-4295