

Safety Concerns

Helpful tips

In this section:

- ***Home Safety***
- ***Fire Safety***
- ***Personal Safety***
- ***In Case of Emergency***

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

Making your home safe and secure means:

- 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



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

It will help to take a look at home and personal safety issues from a 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.
- Practice your emergency plan to make sure you can access and reach handles, doorknobs, keys, fire extinguishers, etc. If you are working with a home health therapist, you can talk with them about practicing these skills in your home.
- Throw rugs are very slippery and can increase your risk for falling. For your safety, remove them from your home.
- Pets can be a safety concern. Review any new problems that need to be addressed.
- Depending on your situation, your home may need to be remodeled and have safety features added. For ideas, watch the video “Home Modification after Spinal Cord Injury” at http://sci.washington.edu/info/forums/reports/home_mod_07.asp. This video is also useful for people with other disabling conditions.
- Do some research on how to work with remodeling contractors. This is an area of business that receives a large number of consumer complaints. If you have a trusted friend who knows about construction, you may want to ask them to manage your remodeling projects.
- Always have your cell phone or other communication device nearby in case of emergencies.
- At least 1 phone in your home should work even 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 you answer 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 police officer in uniform. 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.
- Keep your medicines list with you at all times. You can keep an electronic record on your cell phone.



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.
- To learn more about fire safety for people with disabilities, visit the U.S. Fire Administration website:
www.usfa.fema.gov/prevention/outreach/media/social_toolkits/toolkit_disabilities.html.

Personal Safety

- Call your local police department and tell them about your living situation. This is especially important 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 abilities.
 - Contact information for the person who has a spare key to your home.
- Ask your local fire or police department if they do home safety inspections. They can advise you on safety tips. There are also private security companies that can provide this service for a fee.
- 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
 - Gas shut-off valve
 - Electrical breaker box

- Your emergency exit plan
- Your medicines and dosing schedule
- Your caregiver should follow your safety rules and keep your information private, 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.
- Consider taking a personal safety course.

In Case of Emergency

- Know what disasters could affect your area.
- Make a plan and develop an emergency kit that contains everything you would need for 3 days.
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides information for emergencies for individuals with functional or access needs, including tips on making a plan and building an emergency kit. Visit www.ready.gov/disability to learn more.

Notes

Questions?

Your questions are important. Talk with your doctor, nurse, or other healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

While you are a patient on UWMC’s inpatient rehab unit, call 8.4800 from your bedside phone. From outside the hospital, call 206.598.4800.

After discharge, call your primary care provider or UWMC’s Rehabilitation Clinic: 206.598.4295