

Home Safety for people with Huntington disease

Wherever we live, we aim to make our home as safe as possible. This fact sheet lists some suggestions for adapting homes to minimize danger and maintain independence for as long as possible – for people affected by Huntington disease (HD). It is important for caregivers and people with HD to re-evaluate home safety periodically as abilities change over the course of the disease. Your HSC worker will be able to help you access the support of an occupational therapist (OT) in your area. The OT will then be able to assess the current living situation and provide information on financial assistance available for home adaptations and equipment.

GENERAL

- Remove all throw rugs and loose mats from the home and keep floors clear of obstacles and tripping hazards like electrical and phone cords; use non-slip flooring (preferably not thick carpet) and be mindful of transitions between different types of flooring
- Make sure there is adequate lighting throughout the home including night lights in most rooms and extra lighting on stairways; use lights activated by motion sensors if possible
- Ensure there is a working smoke alarm and carbon monoxide (CO) detector on every floor of the home
- Smokers are encouraged to use smoking robots and smoking blankets/aprons to ensure safety; when possible and safe to do so, encourage smokers to go outside
- There are many smoking cessation products available if one is ready to quit; options can be discussed with a physician
- Post emergency phone numbers near all phones in the home or program numbers into cordless and/or cell phones
- Consider using room monitors for caregivers and medical alert systems (lifelines) and home monitoring systems as well as a buddy system to alert others - if spending long periods of time alone
- Regulate temperature extremes via air conditioning and adequate heating to maintain comfort; use cooling clothing, hats and window coverings to reduce discomfort
- Wear proper footwear (sturdy, non-slip, low-heeled shoes) or socks with grips on the bottom; helmets and hip padding can help prevent head injuries and fractures
- Remember that as the disease progresses, there may be items in the home that become unsafe for people with HD to continue to use (e.g. power tools, hunting and fishing equipment, and motorized vehicles)

BATHROOM

- Use slip-resistant flooring and use non-slip or self-adhesive strips in bath or shower
- Update outlets with ground fault circuit interrupters – in case blow dryer falls in sink
- Install grab bars around tub and toilet and as towel bars; regular towel holders cannot support body weight
- Use items that are designed to assist - hand-held shower, bath bench, raised and/or padded toilet seat; fix a toilet frame to the floor
- Use sturdy bolts for the toilet seat and check them often; consider an add-on bidet seat for cleaning and drying
- Put items within easy reach (e.g. soap, towel) and use bath mitts on hands for washing
- Use a shower curtain rather than glass doors
- Lower the hot water temperature to 49 degrees C (120F) and install a pressure balance valve - to prevent scalds and burns
- Consider using a toileting schedule to prevent rushing and to avoid potential falls

BEDROOM

- Keep lamp or light switch, telephone and eyeglasses all within easy reach of the bed
- A firm mattress with a low bed frame, or a mattress or futon on the floor may be an option - provided clients can still get up without difficulty
- Consider placing a commode next to the bed for nighttime use
- A bed or mat alarm can alert caregivers if assistance is needed

KITCHEN

- Use break-resistant cups and plates, and use insulated cups with lids and handles
- Store frequently used items within easy reach avoid using upper shelves
- Use photocopied recipes covered in plastic to help with cooking tasks
- Keep fire extinguisher near the stove; use stove guards and back burners when possible
- Set a timer on phone, watch or stove as a reminder to turn off appliances
- Use a drain trap in the sink to prevent clogging and lost items

LIVING ROOM

- Stabilize furniture so it cannot move (e.g. anchor bookshelves and TVs to the wall)
- Remove unnecessary furniture and clutter to create a clear path for walking
- Use chairs with high backs and armrests
- Choose table lamps with sturdy bases to prevent tipping; try touch sensitive lamps

STAIRS

- Handrails should extend the full length of the stairs; install railings on both sides of stairs
- Mark the edge of each stair with a contrasting colour, non-slip adhesive tread
- Move necessary items to one level, and avoid carrying items up or down stairs
- When possible, wait for assistance when navigating the stairs

OUTSIDE APPROACHES TO THE HOME

- Mark the edges of each step with bright or reflective tape/paint; use non-slip adhesive
- Consider installing a ramp with handrails as an alternative to the steps
- Eliminate or mark uneven surfaces or walkways, hoses, bushes, foliage and other objects that may cause a person to trip
- Outside light sensors that turn on lights automatically may be helpful for walkways

This fact sheet has been developed and adapted from a variety of resources including the following:

The National Aging Institute's website (www.nia.nih.gov), an institute of the NIH, a U.S. Federal Government agency that provides accurate, up-to-date information about aspects of aging research, information about clinical trials, educational materials and resources about aging for the general public, and information for researchers and health professionals.

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/home-safety-people-alzheimers-disease/introduction>

http://www.wrha.mb.ca/healthinfo/preventinj/files/SOYF_HomeSafetyChecklist.pdf

<http://hdsa.org/living-with-hd/caregivers-corner-webinars/safety-in-the-home/>

Visit the Huntington Society of Canada's website www.huntingtonsociety.ca for other related topics.

