



## Care Partner Information

### *Tips for Providing Older Adult Care*

## Home Safety Issues Part 2: Dementia & Fire Safety

House fires and burns are real dangers for older adults. The three big causes of house fires and burns are cooking, space heaters, and cigarettes. Always be sure there are working smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors on each floor. Keep a fire extinguisher nearby that has been inspected in the last 12 months.

### Safe Cooking

Many people with dementia want to live at home for as long as they can. Being able to cook is important for independence, but it has to be balanced with safety. As the dementia worsens, a person's abilities change. Therefore, it's important to check the person's abilities often to make sure they are still able to cook safely. This skill check is important to do whether the person with dementia is living alone, or with others.

#### Why Most People Living with Dementia Should Not Cook Alone

They may start to cook a meal and forget what they were doing.

They may leave the stove on for too many hours or overnight.

They may burn food on the stovetop and cause a fire.

They may lose sense of time and leave water boiling in a pot too long. The water may dry up completely and the pot can melt from the high heat. They may burn themselves if they don't realize how hot the pot is.

They may leave the gas on and cause an explosion.

They may forget to be careful around an open flame and severely burn themselves or start a house fire.

They may forget how to safely use a microwave and turn it on for way too long, or use metal bowls.

They may spill hot food or water on themselves.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at [www.aging.arizona.edu](http://www.aging.arizona.edu)

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Small changes in the kitchen can help people living with dementia to continue to cook, and lower the risk of fires.

Tips for Safe Cooking	
Label cupboards with pictures and easy words. Buy foods that are easy to cook or prepare.	Use things that are easy to identify and are used for only one thing, such as a kettle.
Remove unsafe tools, such as very sharp knives.	Keep the kitchen well lit.
Ask the gas or electricity company to get on their “priority service register.” They will come to the home to do safety checks and teach about special safety options.	Buy appliances that switch off automatically, such as an electric kettle.

### Space Heaters

People living with dementia should never use a space heater alone. Space heaters start half of all home fires in the winter months. Many models don’t have safety features. They may not automatically turn off when tipped over or when they get too hot. Also check to make sure the heater is not damaged. For example, don’t use it if the cord is worn or frayed.

Tips for Safe Use of Space Heaters
Make sure there is at least 3 feet of clear space around the heater.
Place the space heater out of walking areas so people don’t trip.
Take away the heater right away if the person living with dementia uses it for drying clothes or other unsafe activities.

### Smoking

People with dementia should not smoke cigarettes when they are alone. The symptoms of dementia, such as forgetfulness and poor judgment, make it very risky.

Tips For Smoking Safety
Ask them to only smoke outside. Never allow smoking in a home or building where oxygen is in use.
Ask the person to sit in an upright chair without cushions when smoking, such as at a table.
Don’t allow them to smoke in bed.
Make sure they don't drop hot ashes on their clothes or chair.
Don’t give them their own lighter or matches. Make sure the cigarette is put out when they are done.

**Written By: Mindy J. Fain, MD, University of Arizona Center on Aging**  
Alzheimer’s disease and Related Dementia ~ Care Partner Information

Edited by an interprofessional team from the University of Arizona Center on Aging,  
Alzheimer’s Association - Desert Southwest Chapter and Community Caregivers