



**PREVENTION CAMPAIGN:  
DOMESTIC RISKS AMONG SENIORS**

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Within the context of demographic and social changes that Spanish society is going through, especially the gradual ageing of the population, the emergence of social needs must entail the appearance and consolidation of new social rights. Just as the right to pensions, education and healthcare became universalised in the past, the authorities have now universalised the right to attention for people who find themselves in a situation of dependence (seniors, severe mentally ill people and people with a high degree of disability, among other groups).

The Law 39/2006 of Promotion of Personal Autonomy and Attention to People in a Situation of Dependence, which has been in force for four years now, represents an important effort on the part of the Spanish Government to achieve a fair, adequate and accessible high-quality attention system for those individuals who cannot take care of themselves.

Among the most significant principles which inspire this Law stand out the universal, public nature of the assistance, the access to that assistance on an equal footing and without any discrimination, and the participation of Public Administrations in the exercise of their competences.



As its name indicates, this Law contemplates both the promotion of autonomy and the attention to situations of dependence.

For this reason, we must highlight that the publication of books like this “Prevention Guide: Domestic Risks among Seniors” provides very valuable material for the avoidance of possible dependence situations.

Falls are the most frequent accidents among seniors.

A simple fall can change the life of seniors with serious physical and psychological consequences that limit their autonomy and generate social isolation.

This Guide achieves its aims completely; on the one hand, it supplies qualified information about the prevention of domestic accidents and, on the other hand, it shows us how to react when these accidents occur. The Guide additionally favours an active ageing of seniors with its pieces of advice.

We would like to congratulate the authors as well as **FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE** for the work carried out, which will largely help seniors to have a more autonomous and healthier life.

Natividad Enjuto García  
Former General Director of IMSERSO

The campaign **CON MAYOR CUIDADO [MORE CAREFULLY]** has been born with the intention of encouraging and favouring actions in the area of accident prevention at the homes of those senior citizens who wish to maintain their independence and personal autonomy.

Seniors are particularly exposed to the possibility of suffering accidents at home. The most common mishaps are falls, poisonings and burns. Neither can we forget other accidents such as fires, electrocutions and suffocations.

However, no matter how hard we try to avoid them, accidents take place sometimes. We need to know how to act and do so calmly and rapidly in order to ensure that the consequences are minimal.

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**We have some good news:  
ALL the accidents  
at home can be prevented.**

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The University of Alicante and **FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE**, as institutions that share the concern about the promotion of health and quality of life for the population in general and for senior citizens in particular, wish to convey their interest in the prevention of domestic accidents and the dissemination and promotion of preventive habits among the inhabitants of Alicante through the campaign **CON MAYOR CUIDADO [MORE CAREFULLY]**.

**FUNDACIÓN MAPFRE**, with the collaboration of the University of Alicante by means of the Senior Programme developed by the **Universidad Permanente [Permanent University]** at the San Vicente del Raspeig Campus and at the University Venues and Town Halls in the province, seeks to join efforts to achieve the following aims:

- Making the population aware of the importance that it has to adopt certain preventive habits which can help to avoid domestic accidents.
- Helping the senior to have a safer and more comfortable home.
- Adopting a number of health precautions so that the body can respond in the best possible way.
- Providing professionals and relatives with updated, practical material that can help to avoid this type of accidents.
- Encouraging responsible proactive behaviours among seniors in the personal management of their health and quality of life.
- Boosting personal culture and training in the area of prevention for the purpose of achieving healthy lifestyles.
- Promoting the active ageing of seniors as a means to eradicate social exclusion.

## Prevention comes first. It's time to take care of yourself!



We all want to have good health for many years and maintain our independence. The acquisition of healthy habits will allow us to keep good physical and mental health.

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**Some types of physical activity must be performed at least three days a week for thirty minutes.**

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The moderate exercise of muscles and joints and a healthy, balanced diet that includes fruit, vegetables, milk and dairy products help us to keep fit and to guarantee a better reaction of the body before any accident.

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**Pulses, eggs, meat and fish must be present in our habitual diet.**

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It is essential to visit the family doctor on a regular basis in order to keep health condition and medication under control. It must be remembered that some drugs are likely to affect our senses.

Deficient sight and hearing can increase the risk of suffering accidents; that is why we must have periodical check-ups with an ENT (ear, nose and throat) specialist and an ophthalmologist. Furthermore, our doctor is the person who can give us the best advice about the exercise and the diet that are more suitable for our specific case.

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**Drugs must be taken in the adequate doses and always be prescribed by a doctor.**

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## The importance of avoiding falls

A simple fall can change your life because it may have serious physical consequences such as fractures or contusions. But problems related to the state of mind are likely to arise too: depression, fear, anxiety...

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**Therefore, it is important to AVOID THE FIRST FALL so that physical and mental health can be protected.**

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### Why could we fall?

The physiological changes that accompany us at our age increase the likelihood of suffering falls. On the one hand, our reflexes gradually become slower and our muscular strength diminishes.

The gait (way of walking) is also likely to vary as years go by and sight and hearing will most probably need some 'extra help' to warn us about some dangers.

Moreover, we should not forget the most common diseases among the elderly population. Heart complaints, depression, anxiety, osteoporosis, degenerative osteoarthritis or the sensorial problems affecting sight and balance are risk factors. Likewise, drugs sometimes have side effects such as drowsiness, which can reduce the performance of our reflexes.

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**Being aware of the dangers that exist in our immediate living environment is important so that we can take precautions and avoid falls.**

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## A safer home

If we want to achieve a maximum reduction in the possibility of suffering an accident, our house has to be adapted so that it is as comfortable and safe as possible in relation to our capabilities. We must remove from our home those elements which are likely to hinder movement and replace them with others that favour safety.



### Which characteristics should our house have?

#### 1 LIGHTING

- The light must be wide and indirect in all areas, mainly in the bedroom and the bathroom.
- Shades must be translucent and light-bulbs matt.
- The use of fluorescent tubes is advisable.
- It is very useful to have a pilot light on all night in large rooms and corridors that can help us to see better when moving around the house.

#### 2 LIGHT SWITCHES

- They must be at a height that makes it easy to reach them.
- Their colour should be different from that of the wall as this will help people to find them.
- We can place bright stickers on them so that they can be seen in the dark.

### 3 DOORS

- They should have a minimum width of 80 cm. If they are sliding doors, at least one of them must have that size and the guides will have to be buried in the floor to avoid the presence of a step.
- If the bathroom doors have a safety lock, it should be possible to open them from outside.
- Knobs must be wooden, lever- or handle-shaped.

### 4 WINDOWS

- It is better if they are sliding windows in order to avoid accidents when they are opened towards the inside.
- In hinged windows, knobs should be lever-shaped and with an easy-to-reach handle, situated at a maximum height of 120 cm from the floor.



### 5 FURNITURE

- It is advisable to place few pieces of furniture, especially on the way to the most-often-used areas, e.g. the kitchen and the bathroom.
- The best option is to do without doormats and carpets because they can make people stumble or slip but, if you have them, they should be adhered to the floor.
- Chairs and armchairs must have armrests and back. The seat must be firm and not sink, and the recommended height from the floor is 45 centimetres.
- Untidiness can cause falls.

### 6 BATHROOM

- The safest floor is a nonslip one and it is advisable to replace the bathtub with a shower tray.
- It is advisable to place a non-slip bath mat inside and outside the bathtub or shower tray.
- Raising the height of the toilet bowl reduces the efforts needed to sit down and stand up.
- It is very useful to place support bars in the bathtub, sink and toilet bowl.
- Use nonslip products to clean the bathroom.

### 7 BEDROOM

- The height of the bed must be adapted to each person's needs.
- The recommended height should be between 45 and 50 cm.
- The mattress must not sink and bedclothes have to be light.
- The distribution of furniture must permit to move around the house with a walking frame, a cane or a crutch.
- Clothes must be at hand in the wardrobe.
- The bedside table has to be stable and with a height that makes it easy to access.

### 8 KITCHEN

- The L-shaped distribution of the furniture always provides a support point when moving around the kitchen.
- The floor must be dry and clean. Remember that nonslip floors are safer.
- We must try to make sure that the utensils, pots and pans that we use regularly are within hand's reach. Those which are used the least often can be placed at the bottom of the cupboard.
- It is very useful to have smoke and gas leak detectors installed.

Making these adaptations can be very costly, but public administrations offer subsidies and financial aid so that we can carry them out. You can obtain information through your social worker.



## Knowing how to move

There are a number of precautions that we must adopt in everyday life in order to reduce the possibilities of suffering a fall at home.

**Every little precaution that we take in the daily activities can bring great benefits for health.**

### GOING UP AND DOWN STAIRS

Whenever there are railings or handles, lean on them. The risk of falling diminishes if you go up or down obliquely. When you go up one step, move your trunk forwards; when you go down, refrain from throwing the head and the trunk backwards, as this would make a fall more likely.

The weight of the body always falls upon the leg that moves first; the safest option is to move the healthiest leg first when going up and the least healthy one when going down.

### SITTING DOWN AND STANDING UP



In order to sit down on a chair or armchair, you must place yourself with your back facing the seat feeling it on the legs and with the help of the hands to carry out the movement.

In order to stand up, we will place ourselves on the edge of the seat pushing with our shoulders and arms to facilitate the movement forwards.



### GETTING INTO AND OUT OF THE BED



In order to get into the bed, we must place ourselves with the back to the bed, near the pillow, and sit down. Move the body laterally until you lean your head on the pillow, putting up first the leg that is closer to the bed. If there is a risk of a fall while sleeping, it is advisable to place lateral bars on both sides or to move the bed closer to a wall and place a bar on the other side.



In order to get out of the bed, we will have to lie on our back first. We will initiate the movement raising the neck and the head, bringing the chin closer to the chest and then the shoulders, while you lean the elbows and the palms of your hands on the bed. Then, you will have to take out the leg that is closer to the edge while a spinning movement is made on the glutei and the trunk is finally raised until reaching a seated position.

## DRESSING AND UNDESSING

If we do it standing, it is advisable to have a support point in front of us and a chair or armchair behind us. If we tend to lose our balance quite easily, the best option is to be sitting while we get dressed. It is a good idea to have your clothes prepared in advance to avoid having to bend and make other unnecessary movements.

The pieces of clothing must be loose, comfortable and easy to put on. They should also be hanging at an appropriate height in the wardrobe to avoid efforts such as having to stand on tiptoe.

We must be sitting when we put on our shoes. A suitable type of shoes has to be chosen as well. The shoes with pointed tips or very high heels, those which are too big and do not hold the foot properly, or those which have laces are especially dangerous.



## USE OF THE BATHROOM

If support bars are installed, we must always use them. They have to be well fixed on the bricks, and not on the tiles. It is important to refrain from walking barefoot and to use nonslip footwear at all times.

## CLEANING THE HOUSE

In order to do the housework, we must use brooms, mops and long-arm vacuum cleaners to avoid having to bend. All the activities that we can perform seated, such as ironing, peeling potatoes... will avoid problems related to loss of balance and dizziness.

The iron must be lightweight and it is advisable to have an upper-load washing machine. However, if that is not possible, we will sit down to introduce the clothes keeping the clothes' basket near.

Climbing up a ladder or a stool to clean or hang curtains is totally inadvisable. You must wait until someone can help you.

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**Being able to perform the daily activities does not mean that we do not need help.**

**Many municipalities have domestic assistance programmes that will offer you help with difficult tasks.**

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## GOING SHOPPING

If we use a walking stick, a crutch or a walking frame, we must always take it with us and take short rests from time to time. We must choose nearby shops and buy in person the items which are easy to carry. As for heavier items, we will have them delivered to our home.

Trolleys are very useful to carry the shopping, and they additionally ensure the balance while we are walking.



## How to react before a fall

If you fall despite all the precautions and cares, what do you have to do? We give you two very important pieces of advice:

1. Contact healthcare professionals immediately so that they can assess if you have suffered some physical damage and give you the right treatment.
2. Identify the causes that provoked the accident to prevent it from happening again.

### And how can we stand up after a fall?

We can see graphically how it should be done below:



**STEP 1:** We will turn on our own body until we are lying on our stomach.



**STEP 2:** We will rest our knees until we are on a crawling position. We will look around and search for a strong support element and will come closer to it.



**STEP 3:** We will rest our hands firmly on it and will try to stand using the forearms to help us.



**STEP 4:** Once we are standing, we will rest before starting to walk.

## What you have to do if you suffer an injury

We must know how to react in each case in order to reduce the consequences of falls and alleviate the pain.

If you suspect that you have suffered a fracture or a sprain, you must try and protect the damaged area. The symptoms are swelling or bruises, loss of movement, deformation of the limb and/or localised pain, which increases in intensity if the injured area is moved or pressed. You should never try to 'place' the fractured bone. In the case of sprains, it is advisable to apply ice wrapped in a cloth.

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**If you think that you have broken a bone,  
refrain from moving and request medical attention at once.**

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If you receive a blow on the head and experience breathing problems, have a cut, are sick, lose consciousness or feel confused, you must immediately contact a healthcare professional. Try not to move your neck while you are waiting to be treated because it might be injured.

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**Most head injuries are not serious,  
but some may be serious and must be treated as soon as possible.**

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If a cut causes abundant bleeding, apply pressure on the wound with sterile gauze or some clean cloth and ask for urgent medical help.

## Avoiding poisonings and intoxications

Another usual cause of accidents among senior citizens is poisoning and intoxication. The most frequent ones have to do with the consumption of drugs, the ingestion of food in bad condition and gas inhalation.

### What precautions do we have to take?

#### DRUGS

All medicines must be prescribed by a doctor and dispensed by a chemist. You must follow the directions for use and keep them in a cool, dry place, in their original container or box, with their label and their patient information leaflet. It is advisable to make a list with the medicines and the dose schedule (times) and put it on a visible place. It can be helpful to use a drug dispenser.



#### FOOD

During their transport, conservation or preparation, some food products can be affected by bacteria, like salmonella, and cause a reaction in our body. Personal hygiene as well as cleanness in the kitchen and around food and utensils is basic to avoid poisonings. Fresh meat, fish, seafood and dairy products are particularly sensitive. Do not keep cleaning products near food products and drinks; you will avoid confusions and frights.

#### GAS

Refrain from using small coal braziers, chimneys and butane stoves. Grilles and vents must not be blocked in rooms where there are gas devices. The gas installations should be checked periodically by a qualified technician. If you perceive a gas smell, do not turn on the light, as there could be an explosion; open doors and windows. And when you are cooking, avoid draughts because they can put out the fire of the burner.

If you glaze a terrace or a washing-line area with ventilation grilles, make sure you install them again in order to maintain correct ventilation.

## Burns

Burns are another common type of accident among seniors. The most usual ones are caused by flames, hot liquids or objects at high temperatures such as heaters, cookers, ovens...

### Can we prevent them?

Of course we can, for example, replacing the gas cooker with an electric or a glass-ceramic one. Furthermore, we can use a light deep fryer instead of a frying pan. We can replace braziers or heaters with gas heating. And it is also advisable to use taps with temperature regulators.

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**Burns must be treated differently depending on their seriousness. It must be remembered that the useful recommendations for the minor ones, such as putting them under cold water or applying an ointment, might make them worse if the burn is a serious one.**

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If we suffer a serious burn, the most important thing is to call the emergency services and request their attention at once and wait until they arrive without carrying out any type of intervention on the burn.

#### And above all...

- Do not apply ointments, oils, creams or ice on the injury.
- Do not breathe, blow or cough on the burn.
- Do not touch the skin that is injured or dead or has blisters.
- Do not try to remove the clothes which are stuck to the skin.
- Do not administer anything orally to the person who has suffered the burn.
- Do not immerse a serious burn in cold water because that might cause a shock.
- Do not raise the head if the person has suffered burns in the respiratory tract, as that could block it.



## Other accidents

A number of dangerous situations can arise at our homes but they can also be avoided with the appropriate means and precautions.

### FIRES AND EXPLOSIONS

This type of incidents is more common than we might think and, however, they can easily be avoided. Some advice to prevent them:

- Put out matches and cigarettes completely. Do not throw cigarette butts into rubbish bins and do not smoke in the bed.
- Do not overload plugs with too many devices or appliances.
- Refrain from making homemade connections and always have electrical cables built into the walls.
- Boilers, gas installations and chimneys must be checked periodically by a qualified official technician.
- Do not leave pots or pans on the fire or electrical appliances on when you are going to leave the house.
- Make sure that all the cooker burners are off before leaving the house.
- Do not leave pieces of cloth near the cooker burners.
- If the frying pan catches fire while you are cooking, use the cover to extinguish it.
- If you perceive a smell of gas or suspect that there is a leak, do not turn on the light and open the windows.
- In case of electric fire, do not try to put out the fire with water.
- When cooking, use the burners at the back and try not to place the handles of the pots and pans towards the outside.
- Do not cook with wide sleeves as they can catch fire or get stuck on a handle.

## ELECTROCUTIONS

Electrical discharges may become an important problem. We cannot 'play' with electricity and must take its manipulation very seriously.

For this reason, we must adopt the following precautions:

- Consult a specialised technician to make our home a safer place through the use of protections for plugs, earth wires...
- Never connect any devices or appliances that have previously got wet to the electrical network, even if they seem to be dry and in good condition for using them. Throw away pins, plugs or wires in bad condition.
- Do not handle household appliances immediately after having a bath or a shower and never when some part of your body is still wet. There must be no power points less than one meter away from the bathtub.
- Do not use electrical appliances when you are barefoot, even if the floor is dry.
- Do not have electrical stoves, electricity sockets or any other electrical devices within hand's reach in the bathroom.
- Unplug any appliance that emits some kind of discharge or produces a tickling sensation and send it to a technical assistance service so that it can be checked.
- Refrain from manipulating the electrical installation. Should you have to do it in a case of emergency, turn off the main switch and ask for help.

## First-aid kit at home

We must have one at home, and having it fully equipped becomes essential to provide first aid properly if we suffer a domestic accident.

### IT MUST CONTAIN:

<b>Curing material:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Sterile gauzes of several sizes</li><li>- Bandages</li><li>- Surgical tape</li><li>- Band-aids</li><li>- Compresses</li><li>- Cotton</li><li>- Sterile gloves</li></ul>	<b>Disinfecting products:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 70% Alcohol</li><li>- Hydrogen peroxide</li><li>- Disinfectants</li></ul>
<b>Drugs:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Painkillers (paracetamol, ibuprofen...)</li><li>- Oral serum packages</li><li>- Cream for insect bites</li><li>- Cream for burns</li></ul>	<b>Other materials and products:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Physiological serum</li><li>- Scissors</li><li>- Thermometer</li><li>- Forceps</li><li>- Q-Tips</li><li>- Torch</li></ul>

### REMEMBER:

- All this material must be kept in a safe place to avoid other types of accidents, namely those involving children.
- The medicine cabinet must be airtight but easy to open.
- It is not advisable to place the first aid kit in the bathroom or the kitchen. It must be kept in places which are neither too damp nor too dry.
- When we use some material, it is important to replace it.
- Check the sell-by date of products periodically.



The current society has at its disposal a set of means that allow us to prevent and solve both domestic accidents and their possible causes and consequences. Let us know some of them:

### SOCIAL RESOURCES

#### Home teleassistance service:

It is addressed to senior citizens who live alone. Users wear a medallion or a bracelet with an alarm-button 24 hours a day and if they have some problem, they press the button and get in touch with a specialised attention centre so that help can be sent to them.

#### Home help service:

It is delivered to people who need help to remain at their home. In addition to personal care and attention, it provides support to perform the domestic chores (cleaning, going shopping, cooking, washing and ironing clothes...) and to deal with administrative formalities.

### Where can we apply for social services, grants and subsidies?

These competences are distributed between the different administrations (Municipalities, Autonomous Regions...). The coordination of all these services and financial aids on a national scale is assumed by the:

**Instituto de Mayores y Servicios Sociales (IMSERSO)**  
[Seniors and Social Services Institute]

Avda. de la Ilustración, s/n (con vuelta a C/ Ginzo de Limia, n.º 58) - 28029 Madrid

Switchboard telephone (for all services): 91 363 88 88

Information telephone: 91 363 89 16 / 17 / 09

Website: [www.seg-social.es/imserso/](http://www.seg-social.es/imserso/)

An information service about the Autonomy and Dependence Law has also been made available through the telephone 900 406 080 or the web page <http://www.saad.mtas.es>.

### TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The progress of technology allows us to have at our disposal items that make our life easier and provide us with safety, for instance:

- Lights with sensors which come on when we move around the house.
- Fire and gas and/or water leak detectors.
- Automatic blind closing systems.
- Seats for showers and bathtubs.
- Temperature control thermostats.
- Handles.
- Alarm-equipped or automatic pillboxes.



If we need information, we can contact the:

**Centro Estatal de Autonomía Personal y Ayudas Técnicas (CEPAT)**  
[National Centre for Personal Autonomy and Technical Aids]

C/ Los Extremeños, n.º 1 (Esquina a C/ Pablo Neruda) - 28018 Madrid

Telephone: 91 363 48 00 Text telephone: 91 778 90 64

E-mail: [cepat@mtas.es](mailto:cepat@mtas.es)



A pleasant practical space on the Internet in which is available all the campaign material as well as the activity calendar, etc. The goal is to have direct communication with you so that we can solve any doubts that you might have.



You will find all the contents of this guide, complemented by videos with demonstrations and a section to download formative material on the website [www.conmayorcuidado.com](http://www.conmayorcuidado.com).

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**Be sensible but, if you suffer a serious accident despite all the precautions, ask for attention at the emergency telephone number 112**

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*If you need further information about the campaign **CON MAYOR CUIDADO [MORE CAREFULLY]** or want to collaborate for its dissemination, contact us through the telephone number 91 581 26 03 or visit our web page <http://www.conmayorcuidado.com>*



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