

Keeping Your Home Safe

Preventing Skin Injuries for the Whole Family

Wounds Canada has developed a simple guide that can be used by families to prevent skin injuries at home.

You want your home to be a place where every member of your family feels welcome, comfortable and safe. To protect yourself, and any children or aging loved ones you are caring for, from injury, you may need to make some changes around the house. There are many simple, inexpensive updates you can make, or even simple changes in habit, to ensure everyone's comfort and security.

Be skin safe in every room of your house (and outside too!)

Entry/Mud Room

Risks: Poorly lit hallways can result in tripping and bumping into unseen objects. Uneven floors and objects on the floor such as shoes and backpacks are top tripping hazards.

Remedies:

- Check to make sure all entryways are brightly lit to illuminate the steps and other details. Lighting should be installed so it does not create shadows in some areas.
- Make sure all steps are sturdy and in good repair, have adequate tread depth and have a consistent rise that conforms to a maximum of 20 cm (8 in). Sturdy handrails can prevent falls.
- Ensure doorways are wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs (if required) or people carrying bulky items (such as grocery bags or sports equipment).
- Choose hard flooring surfaces like tile, vinyl, hardwood or laminate. Avoid throw rugs and thick carpets. If you decide to have a soft surface select a low-profile carpet with a non-slip underlay to keep it from moving around or bunching up and creating a tripping hazard.
- Remove any clutter lying around the entryway or floor, including electrical cords.
- Place grab bars on the inside and outside of the entryway to help those with stability and balance challenges.



Disclaimer: The content in this resource is for informational purposes only and is NOT a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. You should always consult with your health-care professional before starting any new treatment or changing or stopping an existing treatment.

Living Room

Risks: Furniture, fireplaces, carpets and electrical devices can pose danger to skin, especially the fragile skin of babies, toddlers and the elderly.

Remedies:

- Anchor vertical furniture pieces like bookcases and media centres to wall studs using brackets or wall straps to prevent them from falling over.
- Replace sharp-edged coffee tables with rounded tables or even a padded ottoman with a tray on top.
- Avoid having glass tabletops, because they are breakable. Even when cleaned up, glass can linger in carpets and cause foot injury days and weeks later.
- Wrap up wires and cords from lamps, televisions and other electrical appliances with electrical tape or ties to prevent tripping.
- Secure unused electrical outlets with childproof covers.
- Move large, heavy or breakable objects away from the edges of tables and off high shelves.
- Secure area rugs with non-slip mats to prevent slipping and tripping. Make sure carpeting lies flat.
- Use boxes and baskets to corral and store clutter such as toys and small objects, to prevent tripping and foot injuries caused by stepping on sharp edges.
- To reduce the chances of burns, identify and correct any potential fire hazards:
 - If you have a fireplace:
 - Make sure it is in good working condition.
 - Replace the mesh screen with glass doors to prevent burns.
 - Consider changing the hearth if it is raised (tripping hazard) or has sharp edges made of bricks or stone (abrasion [scraping] hazard)
 - Regularly check electrical cords to make sure they are not frayed or showing any bare wires or signs of wear.
 - Place space heaters at least 1 m (3 feet) away from anything that can burn.
 - Allow air space around TVs and stereos so they do not overheat.
 - If you must smoke, do so outside. If you smoke indoors, make sure your ashtrays are large and deep. Empty them often. Never smoke anywhere where you are likely to fall asleep.



Dining Room

Risks: Hot foods and sharp implements can lead to skin injury in the dining room.

Remedies:

- Make sure tablecloths are the right length. If they are too long they could get caught when diners are getting up, which can pull hot foods off the table and onto diners.
- Serve food in containers that will protect diners from burns.
- Use potholders or oven mitts to move or carry hot dishes.
- Use extreme care when using open-flame servers like fondue pots and chafing dishes.



- Keep electrical dish warmers on a side table so the electrical cord doesn't reach across open space, causing both a tripping and burn hazard.
- Use chairs that are the right height for children so they don't have to reach or lean, which could cause hot foods to spill on them.
- Keep the dining room floor clutter-free.
- Wipe up spills promptly to prevent slippery floors.
- Remove sharp carving knives from the table once the carving is done. Use electric knives with extra caution.
- Don't place sharp knives inside napkins that diners will have to remove before using.

Kitchen

Risks: The kitchen is said to be the most dangerous room in the house, where mishaps such as cuts, slips and burns are common.

Remedies:

- Store knives in a wooden block or a drawer and out of the reach of children.
- If handwashing sharp knives in the sink, do not place them in the water all at once. Take each knife off the counter and wash them one at a time so you don't lose track of where the "sharks" are in the soapy water.
- When wiping sharp knives (to wash or dry) always face the sharp edge of the blade away from you to reduce the risk of slicing the area between your thumb and first finger.
- Keep knives sharp and learn to hold knives properly to reduce risk of injury.
- Use a hand or finger guard when cutting hard, rounded items to prevent injury if the knife slips off the surface.
- Use extra caution when grating food using a hand grater or slicing food with a mandolin.
- Never cook in loose clothes, especially loose sleeves, or long, loose jewellery, which can knock pots off the stove or absorb hot liquid that can cause burns.
- Keep long hair tied back when using the stove. (This also keeps hair out of the food!)
- Use potholders or oven mitts when handling hot pans, pots and lids. They should not be kept too close to the stove, where they might catch fire.
- Turn pot handles away from the front of the stove so children can't grab them or pull them down, and adults can't bump into them.
- Be aware of the potential for steam injuries that can occur from tea kettles, opening a lid on boiling food or from microwaving.
- Don't crowd breakable items in your upper cupboards; when you are trying to remove just one, they may tumble out, break and cause cuts or bruises.
- Use a proper, sturdy step stool when trying to reach upper cupboards.
- To prevent falls, wipe up spills immediately so floors stay dry.
- Keep a fire extinguisher for your kitchen. Make sure you have quick and easy access to a fire extinguisher near the stove, far enough away that smoke and flames won't block your access to it in an emergency.
- If you keep household cleaners under the sink, make sure to child-proof the cupboard doors if you have small children. In addition to being a poison hazard, many household cleaners can cause burns to the skin, mouth and eyes.



Bedroom

Risks: Fires and falls are the most common causes of wounds in the bedroom.

Remedies:

- Don't smoke in bed.
- Don't place fabric over bedside lampshades.
- Keep a clear space of at least 1 m (3 feet) around any space heaters.
- If you are using candles make sure they have plenty of space around them and are on stable bases so they do not fall or get knocked off. Consider using battery-powered flameless candles instead.
- Attach a safety rail to the bed frame of anyone at risk of falling out of bed—typically young children and seniors with mobility or cognitive issues.
- Move your children to toddler beds as soon as they show interest in climbing out of a crib.
- Place non-slip mats under area rugs and make sure edges lie flat—or avoid them altogether to prevent tripping.
- Keep the floor between the bed and door clear of any objects. Even clothing can be a tripping hazard.
- Provide a nightlight in the bedroom of anyone likely to get up in the dark.



Bathroom

Risks: Thousands of people slip or fall in their bathroom every year, which can lead to serious injuries, including wounds. The most common cause is typical bathroom surfaces that are slippery when wet. Personal hygiene activities such as shaving and nail care can also cause wounds. Burns occur due to water temperature and electrical shocks.

Remedies:

- Prevent slips and falls in the main bathroom by
 - keeping all floor surfaces dry by cleaning up water as soon as possible
 - ensuring floor mats have non-slip bottoms
 - eliminating tripping hazards such as rugs, towels and other objects on the floor
- Prevent slips and falls in the shower or tub by
 - installing a shower bench
 - using non-slip products in the bathtub or on the shower floor
 - installing a handheld or adjustable shower head to allow for a bath chair or bench to be used in the shower by anyone who needs to sit
- If someone in your household has mobility or balance issues, consider upgrading your bathtub to a walk-in tub.



- Keep electrical appliances away from water. Install ground-fault electrical outlets.
- Set your hot water tank to a reasonable temperature. If you have compromised sensation in your hands or feet (you have difficulty feeling hot/cold, pressure/pain) always test the water with you elbow or unaffected limb before use to prevent burns.
- Ensure all towel racks, toilet paper holders, vanities, mirrors, medicine cabinets, grab bars and any shelving or cabinetry are installed securely.
- Install rails, grab bars and other assistive devices to provide extra stability near the toilet, shower and bathtubs.
- Keep chemicals, and cleaning products out of reach of children and in a secure cabinet.
- Ensure all personal care products, such as razors, shavers and scissors, are kept in good repair to prevent cuts.

Laundry Room

Risks: The chemicals in some laundry products can be a risk to skin.

Remedies:

- Keep laundry products in original containers with the original label on them.
- Close containers tightly when not in use.
- Always put laundry products away out of sight and reach of children and pets.
- Read and follow all instructions on the product label. Know where the safety information is located on the label and what to do in case an injury occurs.
- Never combine laundry detergent with other household cleaners. Some chemical mixtures may release irritating or dangerous fumes.
- If a product container is empty, throw it away properly.
- Clean up any spills immediately.
- Keep steam iron safely placed when in use, with no dangling cord and no direct contact with the steam.



Home Office

Risks: Injuries from falls can occur in cluttered, disorganized offices. Faulty electrical devices and outlets with too many devices plugged in can be fire hazards.

Remedies:

- Clear away tripping hazards, such as loose electrical cords.
- Regularly check electrical cords and wires to make sure they are not frayed or showing signs of wear.
- Do not overload any outlets with too many devices.
- Keep paper shredders out of the reach of children.



Garage

Risks: Garages are often one of the most active, and dangerous, places in the home. They require diligence and effort to keep them as safe as possible.

Remedies:

- Store hazardous materials safely, in a locked cabinet.
- Use extreme caution when using power tools to prevent careless accidents!
- Keep portable power tools like saws and drills in a safe place when not in use. For large, stationary tools, disconnect the power cords or remove batteries when you're not using them.
- Make sure to keep all cords in a spot where they won't trip someone walking by or pull the tool off a table or shelf.
- Always use appropriate safety equipment, such as safety glasses, masks, gloves, steel-toed boots and respirators as needed, when working with tools or chemicals.
- Keep a well-maintained garage floor. Make sure the floor is in good repair (no cracks or missing chunks of concrete that could be tripped on) and free of debris that could cause tripping, or liquids that could cause slipping.
- Use well-anchored storage systems that are designed to carry the load you are putting on them.
- Dispose of caustic chemicals (chemicals that can cause burns or erosion) at your local recycling or disposal depot, according to your municipality's bylaws.
- Replace old or damaged electrical cords so they cannot cause electrical burns and fires.
- Yard tools can be surprisingly sharp and can also be tripping hazards. Make sure these are stored safely.

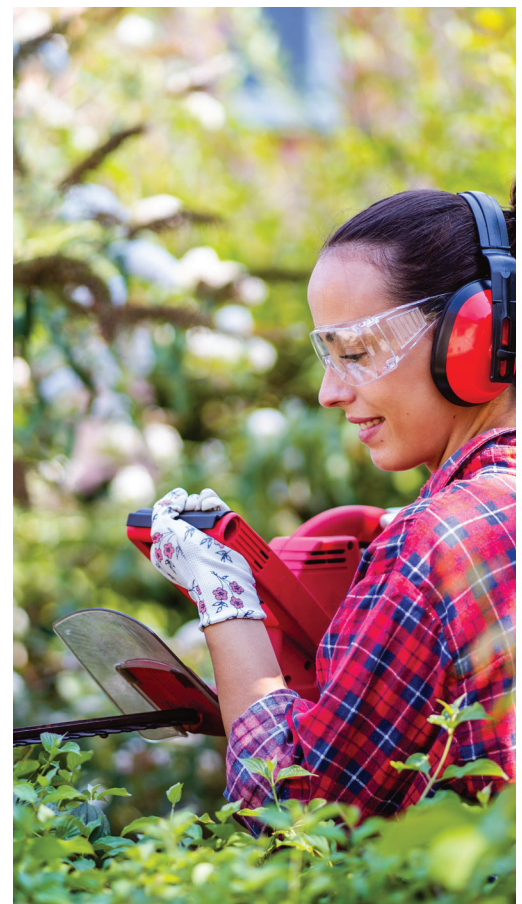


Around the Yard

Risks: Your backyard can be a safe place if you are aware of potential hazards and eliminate them.

Remedies:

- Wear full eye and ear protection, gloves and other protective clothing as appropriate, including closed non-slip rubber-soled shoes, when doing yard work.
- When using a powered hedge trimmer or chain saw, don't trim or cut higher than your shoulders, especially if you're in a tree or on a ladder, to protect your body in case you drop the tool.
- NEVER adjust a powered tool with it plugged in or running.
- Remove objects such as rocks, branches and debris from your yard before using a lawn edger, mower or string trimmer.
- When using equipment such as a string trimmer, work at least 15 m (50 feet) away from people or pets.
- Wear long pants and closed-toed shoes when using the lawn mower—NEVER shorts, sandals or bare feet.
- Never walk backwards while pulling a lawnmower.
- Do not leave garden tools unattended as they can be tripping, cutting or piercing hazards.
- Don't leave sharp garden tools lying out where they may be stepped on or where children can reach them. Store them securely when not in use.



- Outdoor burning can be very risky. Always follow local burning regulations and do not let children get close to fires.
- The barbecue can be a hazard. To avoid fires, always check first that fuel lines are connected properly and in good condition and that burners are not cracked or blocked.
- To avoid falls when using a ladder, ensure it is secured before stepping on it.
- Wear long pants and sleeves and bug repellent to protect from bug bites.
- Beware of locations where stinging insects build their nests or are often present.
- Beware of locations where poisonous, stinging or allergy-causing plants are present.
- Use sunscreen on exposed skin when outdoors and/or wear UV-protective clothing.

Safety Tips for any Room in the House

Fire prevention:

- **Smoke Alarms and Carbon Monoxide Detectors** – Keep at least one smoke alarm and CO detector on every level of your home and inside or near all sleeping areas (or as required by your local building code). Remember to check the batteries regularly. Tip: check batteries twice a year, when the clocks change.
- **Fire Extinguishers** – Make sure you are confident with using one before you need to do so in an emergency. Be aware that there are various ratings for different types of fire.

First aid:

- Before accidents do happen, make sure you are prepared. Keep a fully stocked first aid kit handy so you can quickly care for any injury until you obtain professional assistance, if required.
- For how best to treat minor wounds such as burns and cuts, please see [Minor Cuts \(Cuts, Scrapes and Bruises\)](#).

Adequate lighting:

- Make sure all living areas are bright enough to see any dangers, such as objects you might trip on or sharp objects you might step on. Stairs are a risky place for falls so make sure stairways have good lighting and secure handrails. Have a few flashlights in easy-to-find places as well in case of power outages.
- Consider using a home automation program where lights can be remotely controlled, programmed to turn on and off at certain times of day, and even set up with motion sensors to make sure no one is left in the dark while hunting for a light switch.
- Consider installing lighted switches in key locations so light switches can be found in the dark.

Window safety:

- Children can fall out of a window that is open as little as 12 cm (5 inches). Never leave chairs in front of open windows; children can easily climb onto them and out the window. Consider installing window guards.
- Make sure to keep areas around windows and mirrors clear of objects that could fall and shatter the glass.

Stair safety:

- Adding extra grip to your stairs is another way to avoid stair-related falls and associated skin injury. Add grip tape to non-carpeted stairs or non-slip tread mats.
- Consider a powered stair-assist chair for any family member who has difficulty on stairs.



Tip:

- If you or someone in your family is at risk for falls due to balance and/or mobility challenges or some other type of functional impairment, consider contacting an occupational therapist to conduct a home assessment and make recommendations on how you can create and maintain a safer environment.



CARE AT HOME SERIES

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