

OUT AND ABOUT

WINTER 2015

VOLUME 7 ISSUE 1

our mission:

“Helping Darien seniors
live independently,
comfortably and with
dignity in their own
homes and the community
as long as possible”

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Living At Home



Dear Friends –

Our homes fulfill many needs. A home gives a feeling of independence, and we appreciate how important that is to seniors. It serves as a storehouse of memories, provides the major location for family interaction, and is the major financial asset for most families. A home must also be a safe haven, and at every age, we must be conscientious that our home provides a healthy and secure environment.

Our mission is to help you create a safe home so you can continue to enjoy the independence of living there as you age. This issue of our newsletter is dedicated to you living vitally, dynamically and happily at home. You’ll find it filled with good ideas and safety tips.

As we age, our bodies change. We move a little slower, don’t see quite as well, and our bodies begin to lose some of the core strength needed to maintain balance. Combined, these changes can lead to accidents such as falls, breaks and sprains. We have to make sure our homes also change. Safety for seniors is important and there are plenty of things you can do now so you can continue to live a healthy and active lifestyle for a very long time.

It is my hope that you take a look through your home, or that of a loved one, for potential areas that are, or could become, a hazard. Although accidents are unintentional, there are things you can do to prevent them from occurring and to promote safety.

In order to learn more about living at home healthfully, I am excited to invite you to our first sponsored luncheon at the new Mather Center, on Tuesday, March 10th at 11:00 a.m. This event is free for all Darien seniors and promises to be a good time. Please see the box to the right for more information and rsvp as soon as possible to save your seat.

All the best,

Gina

Gina Z. Blum, Executive Director, **At Home In Darien**

At Home In Darien

Annual Luncheon SERIES 2015

Living Vitally, Dynamically and Happily At Home

Featuring

Dorothy Baker, Ph.D, R.N.,
Research Scientist, Internal Medicine, Geriatrics
Director CT Collaboration for Fall Prevention
Yale University School of Medicine

Join us for an enjoyable and educational
presentation on how your home should meet
your changing needs as you age.

**Tuesday, March 10, 2015
11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.**

**Mather Community Center
2 Renshaw Road, Darien**

**Free presentation and lunch
for all Darien Seniors**

**RSVP by March 3rd
Space is limited, please respond
early to ensure a seat.**



203.655.2227

or

Sandi@AtHomeInDarien.org

Free In-Home Fall Safety Prevention Program

Ligia Masilamani, Director of
Home Care Services for
Seniors at Family & Children’s Agency



Both the physical limitations of aging and increasing impact of medical conditions play a decisive role in whether a senior can age successfully at home. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), each year, one out of every three people ages 65 and older will experience a fall, and over two million are treated in emergency departments.

Although the threat of a fall is real, there are several preventative measures that older adults and their caregivers can take to prevent a fall from occurring. Home Care Services for Seniors at Family & Children’s Agency (FCA) has partnered with **At Home In Darien**, who will provide funding, in order to offer free in-home Fall Safety Prevention evaluations to Darien seniors.

A registered nurse or a specially trained caregiver will come to your home and discuss potential hazards and how you can help prevent a fall.

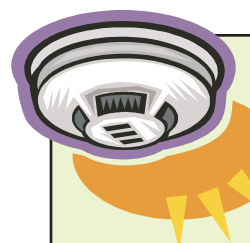
Upon meeting, the FCA caregiver can also refer you to other services provided by FCA or its partnering agencies to ensure you may remain safe and independent in your own home. Due to the services offered by Home Care Services for Seniors at FCA, 94 percent of older adults did not experience a fall this past year.



Call **At Home In Darien, 203.655.2227** for more information about a free in-home Fall Safety Prevention evaluation.

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AT HOME
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Carbon Monoxide Safety Tips

The Connecticut State Department of Public Health is warning people about the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning. Residents should have their heating systems serviced and carbon monoxide detectors installed and maintained. CO detectors are the only way to know that the deadly gas is present.

The State Health Agency offers the following safety tips:

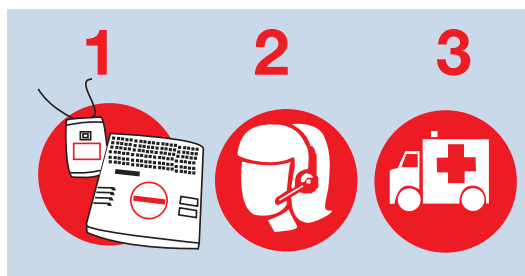
- 1 Install a carbon monoxide detector near sleeping areas and install new batteries at least once a year. Detectors should be replaced every 5 – 10 years because the sensors degrade over time.
- 2 Have heating systems, chimney flues, gas appliances and generators checked every year, and cleaned and serviced as needed by qualified heating or appliance contractors.
- 3 Never use portable generators, or other gasoline-powered equipment (including tools) inside your home, garage, carport, basement or other enclosed spaces. Be sure portable generators are at least 20 feet from your home.
- 4 Use gasoline-powered equipment outside and away from doors, windows or air intake vents.
- 5 Use grilling apparatus such as charcoal or gas grills outdoors only.
- 6 Opening windows and doors, and operating fans is not sufficient to prevent buildup of CO in a home.
- 7 Get out of the house and seek medical attention immediately if anyone in the house has unexplained or sudden onset of symptoms of CO poisoning such as headache, fatigue, dizziness, nausea or vomiting and loss of consciousness. Call 911 from a cell phone or a neighbor's home and the Connecticut Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.

Do you have a working smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) detector? Are fire extinguishers available in your home on every level?

Contact **At Home In Darien, 203.655.2227** if you'd like to have someone check the batteries in your home safety devices.

Medical Alert Systems – A Smart System for the Elderly Who Live Alone

There are many devices, sometimes called personal emergency response systems or medical alert systems, that will summon for help in the event of an emergency. They all work in generally the same way – when emergency help is needed, the senior presses the button that is secured around the neck or wrist. The button transmits notification directly to an emergency response center (medical, fire and police) and help is immediately on its way. There are various devices and plans on the market and it is important to choose one that best matches the seniors' needs. Here are some important points to consider when purchasing an emergency alert system for yourself or a loved one.



Determine the type of monitor needed. If the senior is prone to falling, a device that can be activated without having to reach a phone would be preferable. Some monitors allow you to tell when the person wakes up or leaves the home. Some seniors will not wear a monitor, so you may want to consider a video monitor.

Plan for the future. When you purchase a system, the senior may be capable of pushing a button; however that could change over time as he or she ages. Be sure your contract is flexible and allows you to make necessary changes as they arise.

Consider the range of area/length of time you need covered. If the senior likes to garden or be outside, make sure the yard is monitored. If the senior is recovering from a hospital stay and only needs temporary monitoring, don't sign a long term contract. Also, if the senior relocates to another home, can the services be easily transferred?

Find out about features offered. Be sure to ask about response time, technical support, and warranty on parts or service. Is the device portable if the senior goes on a trip? Also ask: Is the plan 24/7? Is the device waterproof? An important consideration since most accidents happen in the bathroom. Does the system test itself every week? This is vital to ensure the system is working properly.

Consider the costs. Are there additional start up or set up fees? Are there cancellation fees if you need to terminate the contract early? Ask if there are false alarm charges – if a senior presses the button accidentally, or habitually.

Compare plans and prices of systems offered in your area. As with all purchases, be sure to pick the plan that will give you the best peace of mind because you are usually locked in once you sign a contract. Be sure to research the company to ensure they are reputable. Ask how long they have been in business and ask for references. Also, ask how about how they train their employees.

Contact **At Home In Darien, 203.655.2227** if you'd like a referral for a medical alert system.

Pearls of Wisdom – Household Hazards

By Joan Blumenfeld, MS, LPC

Sam was alone in his office the day his hip broke. He crashed to the floor and lay there stunned. Then slowly and painfully he dragged himself along the floor to the phone and called 911. My heart sank when I got the call from the Emergency Room at Norwalk Hospital. I dropped everything and rushed right over.

The surgery to replace Sam's hip was performed immediately, one of those incredible high-tech miracles of modern medicine. The operation was a success but his recovery was long, difficult and complicated. Sadly, he never did regain his ability to walk without a walker and needed assistance with walking, dressing and bathing for many months.

I discovered that our house was chock full of hazards that I had never even noticed before. We had colorful scatter rugs distributed throughout the house. We had two staircases, one going up to the bedrooms and baths, another going down to the basement and garage. The bathrooms had the usual array of porcelain fixtures and tiles that were "slippery when wet." Our living room had low, overstuffed seating. As Sam got stronger he was able to move around the house more. These booby traps became serious safety hazards which could have caused some nasty falls. Clearly changes had to be made!

I removed many of the scatter rugs altogether and put non-skid padding under others. I had a second banister installed on each of the staircases so that no matter which way Sam was going, up or down, he could hold onto something that would steady him. The bathrooms each got their allotment of grab bars and Medicare gave him a bath seat so he could sit while showering. The living room got a minor facelift by way of a new chair that was firmer, higher and had arms so it was less difficult to get in and out of it.

The changes were not very costly and were absolutely essential for Sam to be able to get around the house safely. As a serendipity, these changes made our home safer for me and our older friends as well.

Pearl of Wisdom: Do a safety check in the homes of your older relatives or friends and eliminate the hazards. It's a sound fall prevention strategy.

Here are some tips to help light the way:

- Contrasting colors play a big part in seeing well. As much as possible, the color of furniture, toilet seats, counters, etc., should be different from the floor color.
- Be sure to provide enough no-glare lighting - indirect is best.
- Place light switches next to room entrances, so that lights can be turned on before entering a room.
- Have light switches at both the top and bottom of stairways.
- Consider "clap-on" lamps beside the bed.
- Use 100- to 200-watt light bulbs for close-up activities (be sure your lamps can handle the strong wattage).

A Bright Idea

Did you know an 85 year old needs about 3x the light a 15 year old needs to see the same thing?



A Home for a Lifetime Are You and Your Home a 'Good Fit'?

By Amy Levner, Manager, Home and Community, AARP Education & Outreach

If you are like most Americans, you want to continue living in your current home and community as long as you can. But are you and your home a "good fit"? Will you be able to enjoy your home and will it continue to meet your needs as your lifestyle and abilities change?

It's always better to plan ahead rather than wait for a crisis. Unfortunately, most people don't discuss or think about the livability of their home until something happens, such as managing a broken leg in a house full of stairs. Usually, the crisis makes it obvious they are living in a place that might need some modifications to make it work for them.

Here are eight simple questions to get you thinking about whether your home meets your current – and future – livability needs.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 Is there at least one step-free entrance into the home? | 5 Does the bathtub or shower have a non-slip surface? |
| 2 Are the doorways and hallways wide enough for a wheelchair to pass? | 6 Can light switches, electrical outlets and thermostats easily be reached, even from a seated position? |
| 3 Do the doorknobs and faucets have lever handles, which are easier to use than rounded knobs? | 7 Are there secure handrails on both sides of stairways? |
| 4 Are there grab bars in the bathroom, or has the wall been reinforced so they can be added? | 8 Can the windows be opened with minimum effort? |

While some of these improvements, like widening door frames, might require major repairs, many solutions can be as easy and low-cost as installing lever handles.

To get a complete assessment of your home, enlist the help of an occupational therapist or a home modification professional who has earned the Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS) designation.

To find a home modification professional in your area, visit the *American Occupational Therapy Association* (<http://www.aota.org/>) or the *National Association of Home Builders* (www.nahb.org). Get more home tips from AARP's *Home Fit Guide*, available online at www.aarp.org/homefit or call 1-888-OUR-AARP and ask for Stock #D18959.

Contact **At Home In Darien, 203.655.2227** if you'd like a referral to one of our vetted service providers who you can hire for home repairs and/or modifications.

The Bathroom The Most Dangerous Place in the Home

While no room in your home should lack protection from slips and falls, bathrooms present a much greater risk for these types of accidents. Wet floors, tubs, and shower stalls are prone to danger, and taking proper preventative measures is essential for a safe living environment. The following five items can help to make the bathroom safer for seniors.



Support bars – Horizontal and vertical tub and shower bars are useful and provide a stable support system. They make getting in and out of the bathtub easier, and can hopefully be used in case someone does slip. Have a professional install the bars to make sure they are properly secured into the wall.

Adhesive mats – Shower stalls and bathtubs are slippery, especially when wet. Adhesive, rubber-backed mats remain fixed to the floor and offer adequate foot grip at all times, and that means no slipping around.

Shower chairs – Wheelchair-bound elderly adults and those who have a difficult time standing for long periods are best served by a shower chair. These devices feature ergonomic design for maximum comfort and rubber-soled feet to prevent sliding. Shower chairs are best used in conjunction with hand-held shower heads.

Raised toilet seats – Most standard toilets are fixed too low to the ground for elderly individuals, but the installation of a raised seat can increase seat height several inches. When equipped with side grab bars, an elderly adult will have no problem sitting down and standing up on their own.

Transfer bench – If your bathtub is not wheelchair-friendly or does not feature a door for easy entry, a bath bench is the next best thing. Simple and inexpensive, these seats extend outside of the tub. Rather than climb over the tub wall and risk slipping, instead, the elderly adult sits down and scoots inward.

The ideal bathroom for any senior will include all of these items, but the addition of any one of them will make a huge difference as far as senior bathroom safety goes!

Are You Prepared in Case of Emergency?

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recommends that all Americans have some basic supplies on hand and organized to last at least 3 days. Be sure to pack an emergency kit in a waterproof box with a lid. The box should be small enough to carry out of your house easily in an emergency, but large enough to include the following items:



No one likes to think about an emergency situation, but planning ahead may help to prevent the situation from happening in the first place, or lessen the severity of the event. Be prepared. Have a plan in case a fire happens. This includes ensuring there are well-defined escape routes. Also, make a monthly habit of having a fire drill. Preparation can go a long way in keeping panic and fear to a minimum in case of the real thing.

Safety Outside Your Front Door



Getting in and out of your home safely is critical. Make sure you have a clear path in and out, and to your mailbox. Check for obstacles, like shrubbery, and look for cracks, or loose stones in your sidewalk, driveway, and stairs, that could be a tripping hazard. Make sure you have secure railings and strong outdoor lighting for good visibility, especially on stairs and walkways.

In foul weather, be careful when walking outdoors, and avoid going out alone on ice or snow. During the winter, ask someone to spread sand or salt on icy surfaces. Be sure to wear boots with good traction if you must go out when it snows.



At Home In Darien
provides the following
services for free
to all Darien residents age 60+:

-  **Transportation within Darien, Stamford, Norwalk and New Canaan, Monday - Friday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.**
-  **Telephone referral, advice and counsel.**
-  **Communication and Programs —**
Out and About newsletter.
Monthly calendar of events promoting events and services.
Social and educational programs throughout the town.
-  **Handy Services —**
Volunteers including Friendly Visitors, Shoppers, Helpers and Drivers along with seasonal services such as snow shoveling and leaf raking.
Referrals to discounted vetted service providers such as:

Appliance Repair
Computer Services
Electricians
Hairdressers
Handymen
Landscapers
Plumbers
Repairmen
Small Chores
and more!

Preventing Falls










Movies and television usually depict a slip and fall as comical and lighthearted. But for seniors, slips and falls are no laughing matter.

Every 18 seconds, an older adult has to go to the emergency room because of a fall, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Falls can be devastating for seniors, often causing injuries that take months to heal. These traumatic events can be devastating for the spouses and family of seniors as well, as they must shoulder the caregiving burden during recovery and rehabilitation.

The best way to avoid the serious problems associated with falls is to prevent falls in the first place. Exercising regularly is one of the best way to prevent falls. Exercises that improve balance, such as yoga and tai chi, are great ways to help prevent falls. It's also important to review your medications with your doctor or pharmacist to make sure you don't have to worry about interactions between your medications that could make you dizzy or otherwise increase your fall risk.



Tips to Fall-proof Your Home and You!

-  Remove anything that could cause you to trip or slip while walking. Clear clutter, small furniture, pet bowls, electrical or phone cords.
-  Arrange furniture to give you plenty of room to walk freely. Remove items from stairs, hallways, and pathways to keep walkways clear.
-  Be sure that carpets are secured to the floor and stairs. Remove throw rugs, use non-slip rugs, or attach rugs to the floor with double-sided tape.
-  Put non-slip strips on steps.
-  At home and elsewhere, try to avoid wet floors and clean up spills right away.
-  Place a lamp within easy reach of your bed. Put night lights in the bathroom, hallways, bedroom, and kitchen. Also keep a flashlight by your bed in case the power is out and you need to get up.
-  Have handrails installed on both sides of stairs and walkways. If you must carry something while walking up or down stairs, hold the item in one hand and use the handrail with the other. When you're carrying something, be sure you can see where your feet are stepping.
-  Keep items you use daily on lower shelves, so they will be in easy reach. This simple change could prevent a fall that might come from standing on a stool to get to an item.
-  Have your vision checked regularly. Being able to see well will go a long way to stopping falls. An older adult's vision can change quickly due to medical reasons or even due to medications.



Make sure you know what's going on around town... subscribe to our monthly calendar of events!

Email Sandi@AtHomeInDarien.org or call **203.655.2227** to request to receive it by mail.



Thank you!

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all of the volunteers who participated in our leaf raking program this fall – St. Thomas Moore Youth Group of Darien, Boy Scout Troop 35, Church of Latter Day Saints Youth Darien Ward, Darien Youth Travel Hockey Squirt A team and to all of their parents, Lucy Ackemann, the Darien Y Adventure Guides and Princesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints in Stamford. They spent hundreds of combined hours raking, bagging and hauling leaves from the homes of 32 appreciative Darien Seniors.

A special thank you to those who "retired" from our Board of Directors at the end of 2014 – Anne Ardery, Cindy Heck, Deborah McLean, Ann Mandel, John Schmidt, Ernie Steiner and Maureen Tyrrell. We thank them for all they have done to make our organization a valuable resource for the Darien community!

We welcome our new Board members - Mallory Arents, Karen Goersch, Dr. Joshua Herbert, Sue Ozanne and Lisa Shanahan!