

Chapter 8

SAFETY MEASURES

What You Will Learn

- The causes of accidents
- Which clients require specific safety measures
- How the In-Home Aide can help prevent falls, fires and burns and poisoning
- Nursing care measures to ensure client's safety
- Reasons for using safety devices
- Identify safety/assistive devices
- Safety measures for a safe environment

Accidents

Accidents are usually caused by a combination of factors. Tumors and tremors can cause loss of balance. Lack of oxygen to the brain or low blood sugar can cause dizziness. Loss of balance during position changes can also cause dizziness and falls. Wet floors or other floor hazards such as extension cords or clutter can cause falls. Confusion or forgetfulness can affect a client's judgment. Changes in vision, especially depth perception, dim lighting condition, and changes in furniture arrangements can be a problem.



Clients Who Require Specific Safety Measures

Some clients are a higher risk of having accidents than others. Clients who are confused due to medication, have poor nutritional status, or diseases of brain or cardiovascular system are at a higher risk of injury. Elderly clients are also at higher risk. With aging there is a decrease in the sense. Clients are less aware of danger warning signals. Inner ear disturbances and orthostatic blood pressure changes can result in a loss of balance. Older clients have longer reaction times. The client who is sedated with drugs or is unconscious may require extra safety measures.

Preventing Falls, Fires and Burns, and Poisoning

Causes of falls include tripping, slipping, climbing, or reaching for items. Shoes that are untied, the wrong size, or on the wrong foot present a risk. Loose clothing that is too long can cause falls. Floors that are slippery because of wax or spills as well as worn, uneven rubber tips on canes



and walkers can cause falls. The bathroom and stairs are two areas where falls commonly occur.

To help prevent falls, always change the client's position slowly. This provides time for the client to gain equilibrium (balance). Make sure the client wears comfortable, well fitting shoes with broad, low heels. Bedroom slippers do not offer support. Shoelaces must be tied. Clothing should not be too long or very loose. Remove any obstacles from floors and wipe spills up immediately. When transferring a client, make certain wheelchairs, beds, and Geri chairs have their wheels locked. Use bed side rails as instructed by the nursing supervisor and/or client. The bed adjustment handle on a hospital bed should be in the "in" position when not being used. Leave adjustable beds in the lowest horizontal position when not giving care. Orient client to any change in furniture location and use gait belts properly.

Report to the supervisor/nurse if a client complains of dizziness, is prone to falling, walks with an unsteady gait, or slides out of a wheelchair. Report broken equipment (such as grab bars or wheelchair locks) immediately! Use equipment correctly. Do not use broken equipment or equipment you have not been trained to use. Immediately report any hazards such as leaks in the bathroom, burned out lights, loose grab-bars, or loose carpeting.

Fire and burns are commonly caused by smoking, especially by a confused person. Oxygen use, electrical overload, frayed wires and loose connections can all contribute to an increased risk. Because the elderly have a decreased awareness of sensations of pain and temperature, they are more likely to be burned by hot liquids or foods.

You can help to prevent fires and burns! If oxygen is in use, take special precautions. "NO SMOKING – OXYGEN IN USE" signs should be posted. Encourage the client to turn off their oxygen when it is not in use. Oxygen should not be used in areas where people are smoking or there are open flames such as near a gas stove or barbecue pit. Avoid the use of flammable substances such as nail polish, alcohol, or hair spray on client. Do not use petroleum based products on face. Explain oxygen precautions to visitors. Follow the in-home provider policies regarding oxygen use. Check the water temperature in showers and tubs. Assist clients at mealtime to prevent spilling hot liquids. Know the location of fire extinguishers and how to use them. Know the evacuation route to follow for evacuating clients in case of a fire. Immediately report any signs of electrical overload, frayed wires, or loose connections.



In case of a fire – "RACE"

R = Immediately REMOVE the client from danger.

A = Once the client is safe, ALERT EMS by calling 911 or the fire department.

C = Once the alarm is sounded, CLEAR the area and follow the evacuation plan as practiced. Also be sure to contain the fire by closing the doors.

E = If safe, attempt to EXTINGUISH the fire.

Poisoning can occur when a client mistakenly drinks a harmful liquid or takes another family member's medication. Some clients hoard medications which can result in an overdose. Visitor's or employee's purses are another potential source of poisoning from medications. To prevent poisoning make certain harmful liquids (e.g., cleaning solutions, fingernail polish remover, unauthorized medications, lighter fluid, insect spray, etc.) are not placed where a confused client might swallow them.

It is a good idea to post the local poison control center phone number by the phones in case of an emergency.

Additional Safety Measures for All Clients

It is your responsibility to provide your clients with the safest environment possible. Box 8.1 lists safety measures to be used with all clients.

Box 8.1: Safety Measures

- Check eyeglasses for cleanliness and make sure the client wears his own eyeglasses.
- Check the client's hearing aid to make sure it is functioning properly and encourage him to wear it.
- **NOTE: HANDLE MECHANICAL AIDS WITH CARE. THEY CAN BE EXPENSIVE TO REPLACE IF DAMAGED.**
- When feeding clients, take precautions to avoid burns from hot food.
- Give instructions clearly to prepare client for activity.
- When bathing clients, check water temperature on the inside of your forearm to avoid burning the client.
- Correctly apply all safety/assistive devices.
- Observe client's ability to ambulate safely. Report unsteady gait, poor balance, slumped posture, or complaints of dizziness to the supervisor or nurse.
- Closely watch clients who may wander away.
- Immediately report to the supervisor/nurse if you think a client is a danger to himself or others.
- Provide proper positioning of all body parts (including breasts and scrotum) to prevent excessive pressure.

Encourage clients to sit in comfortable, well-fitted chairs. Foam, wedge-shaped seat cushions often keep the client from sliding out of chair. Be sure the thickest edge is at the FRONT of chair. Sturdy rocking chairs may help fill need for constant motion. If a client is not able to propel a wheelchair independently, he should be seated in it only for transport purposes.



Accept the fact that restless, anxious clients must be allowed to walk when able. Make the environment as safe as possible and allow them freedom to move about.

Side rails can provide security and can be used as grab bars for turning in bed. One-half or three-quarter side rails are best for preventing the necessity of climbing over rails or footboards to get out of bed. It may be necessary to pad the floor area if there is a risk of the client falling from the bed. In severe cases, consider putting the mattress on the floor.

Using Safety/Assistive Devices

It is not the device but the manner in which a device is used that determines whether it is a safety/assistive device or a restraint. It is important to understand that each client is an individual with personal needs. Care must be "customized" for the client's particular situation. What works for one situation may not work for another.

Safety/assistive devices are used to help a client maintain proper body position and balance. They are also used to ensure the client's safety and keep a client who is confused from disrupting a treatment procedure, such as IV, nasogastric tube, or dressing.

Examples of safety/assistive devices include:

1. Transfer or gait belts – a canvas belt with an adjustable buckle; placed around the client's waist; used when transferring or ambulating client.
2. IV arm boards – prevents movement of a joint and disruption of IV fluids or medications.
3. Abdominal binders – to secure abdominal dressing or limit client access to a g-tube.
4. Positioning devices such as wedge cushions.
5. Devices to keep dressing in place such as a Stockinette or an arm/leg.



NOTE: NEVER USE AN ASSISTIVE DEVICE THAT YOU DO NOT KNOW HOW TO USE.

Safety Measures for the Environment

The In-Home Aide is responsible to providing a safe environment for the client. This can be done by cleaning up untidy conditions in the client's room and wiping up spills promptly. Clients should be encouraged to use grab bars in the shower and bath when they are available. Examine wheelchairs, Geri-chairs, walkers, and other equipment for broken parts. If damage is found, it should be reported to the supervisor/nurse.

Keep all walkways free of hazards, such as shoes, chairs, and bed cranks. Never use electrical equipment with wet hands or near water and report any equipment that causes electrical shock when handled. Articles such as water glasses and tissues should be placed within the client's reach. Nightlights and adequate lighting should be considered. Pets and general clutter can pose safety hazards.

The In-Home Aide is responsible for providing safety for her clients. Consider these factors every minute while at work. It is extremely important because so many clients depend on the In-Home Aide to meet this basic human need.

Chapter Review

1. What causes accidents?
2. Which clients require specific safety measures?
3. How can the In-Home Aide help prevent falls, fires and burns and poisoning?
4. Which nursing care measures ensure client safety?
5. Why are safety devices used?
6. What are some examples of safety/assistive devices?
7. How can you provide a safe environment?

Student Exercise

Complete the following short-answer questions.

1. Identify five common causes of accidents.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.

2. Identify two types of clients who may require specific safety measures.
 - a.
 - b.

3. Describe three safety/assistive devices.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

4. List four things the In-Home Aide can do to provide a safe environment for the client.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

Match the following types of accidents to measures that In-Home Aides can take to prevent accidents by writing the letter in the blank.

- | | | |
|-------|---|---------------------|
| ___5. | Wipe up spills immediately. | A. Falls. |
| ___6. | Keep harmful liquids out of the reach of clients. | B. Fires and burns. |
| ___7. | Do not use electrical equipment around oxygen. | C. Poisoning. |

Complete the following short-answer question.

8. Give three reasons for using safety devices.
- a.
 - b.
 - c.