

# Answers for the Aging: Home safety and Alzheimer's

**Q.** I live in a senior independent living apartment. I am blessed to have good health, but my 78-year-old sister lives at home with her husband. She was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease two years ago. My brother-in-law is taking good care of her, but he is worried about her safety due to her memory loss and confusion. Do you have suggestions?

**A.** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services developed the publication "Home Safety for People with Alzheimer's disease." This publication provides information to help people identify potential problems in the home and offers possible solutions to help prevent accidents.

The publication includes a safety checklist for each room of the house. There are a variety of suggestions for each room. Some of the suggestions include hide a spare house key outside in case the person with Alzheimer's disease locks you out of the house; keep all medicines locked up; remove poisonous plants; remove scatter rugs to reduce the risk of falling; lock away household cleaning products, knives, scissors and blades; and adjust the hot water heater to 120 degrees to avoid scalding tap water. The booklet also includes information about important factors to consider when determining whether it is safe to leave a person with Alzheimer's disease alone.

This booklet also provides recommendations regarding what to do when a person with Alzheimer's disease exhibits challenging behaviors like wandering, rummaging/hiding things, hallucinations, and illusions and delusions. For example, if your loved one tends to rummage and hide things, create a special place like a chest of drawers, basket of clothes or bag of objects for the person to rummage or sort. If your loved one suffers from illusions, avoid violent television shows because he or she may believe the story is real. It may also be helpful to cover the mirrors because he or she may become confused or frightened upon seeing his/her reflection.

The publication also indicates since large family gatherings may cause anxiety for

the person with Alzheimer's disease, it may be helpful to consider having friends and family visit in small groups rather than all at once. There is also a section regarding how Alzheimer's disease can impact a person's senses and what steps can be taken to address these challenges. Contact Catholic Charities' Answers for the Aging at 410-646-0100 or 1-888-502-7587 (toll-free in Maryland) if you would like a copy of this free booklet or other information regarding senior issues.