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## Home Safety Inventory for Older Adults with Dementia

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**WHY:** People with Alzheimer's disease (AD) and other dementias often develop impairment in executive function, resulting in poor judgment and decision making. These problems put the older adult with dementia at risk for accidents and injuries in the home environment. Most injuries occur in the home setting (Rowe & Fehrenbach, 2004) but researchers have found that caregivers are often not aware of potential safety hazards or strategies to make the home environment safer (Lach, Reed, Smith, & Carr, 1995). Comprehensive assessment of home safety and common hazards allows nurses to identify potential risks and educate caregivers on preventative measures (Hurley, et al., 2004).

**BEST TOOL:** The Home Safety Inventory (HSI) provides a list of potential safety problems to review with individuals and caregivers. Indication of potential safety problems, or history of accidents or incidents can be noted and suggestions to address concerns can be listed on the HSI form. Completing the HSI makes caregivers aware of the variety of safety problems that can occur and helps begin the conversation about modifying the environment, supervision, or other strategies that might be indicated.

**TARGET POPULATION:** Older adults who live alone have the greatest risk of injury, but even those with caregivers may have accidents. The rate of injury for people with AD is 1.6 times higher than the national average for community-dwelling older adults, and the fall rate is 1.9 times higher (Oleske, Wilson, Bernard, Evans, & Terman, 1995).

**VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY:** The HSI has been used clinically and in research with caregivers of older adults with dementia to assess home safety problems (Lach, Reed, Smith, & Carr, 1995; Lach & Chang 2004). Psychometric testing has not been done.

**STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS:** The HSI is a clinical tool and items were selected based on studies of safety problems in people with dementia, and allows for individualization. The assessment tool may not include all of the possible safety problems. Health professionals should individualize the items based on clinical assessment of the individual and home environment.

**FOLLOW-UP:** Caregivers need education about the possible safety problems that may arise, since older adults with dementia can get lost or have an accident or injury without any warning. These occurrences can happen early in the progression of the disease when the caregiver is not aware of the individual's deficits. Completing the HSI with caregivers can help them identify early signs of difficulty with activities that may indicate a risk for safety problems and injury. The HSI should be reviewed and updated if there are changes in cognition or functional abilities.

### MORE ON THE TOPIC:

Best practice information on care of older adults: [www.ConsultGerRN.org](http://www.ConsultGerRN.org).

Alzheimer's Association. See web site: [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org) for Safety Center with information on wandering, driving and other safety topics.

Hurley, A. C., Gauthier, M. A., Horvath, K. J., Harvey, R., Smith, S. J., Trudeau, S., Copolloni, P. B., Hendricks, A., & Duffy, M. (2004).

Promoting safer home environments for persons with Alzheimer's disease: The Home Safety/Injury Model.

*Journal of Gerontological Nursing*, 30(6), 43-51.

Lach, H. W., & Chang, Y. P. (2007). Caregiver perspectives on safety in home dementia care.

*Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 29(8), 993-1014.

Lach, H. W., Reed, A. T., Smith, L. J. & Carr, D. B. (1995). Alzheimer's disease: Assessing safety problems in the home.

*Geriatric Nursing*, 16(4), 160-164.

Rowe, M. A. & Fehrenbach, N. (2004). Injuries sustained by community-dwelling individuals with dementia.

*Clinical Nursing Research*, 13(2), 111-116.

## Home Safety Inventory

Complete home assessment and review categories and issues with caregivers.  
Note problems and recommendations on the appropriate categories below.

Safety Category	Problems/ Accidents	Precautions	Strategies/Suggestions
Falls			
Cooking			
Driving			
Wandering			
Smoking			
Use of appliances or power tools			
Use of sharps (knives or scissors)			
Combativeness/aggressiveness			
Firearms			
Poisons			
Hot water or weather, cold weather			
Eating/swallowing difficulties			
Other judgment or safety issues (based on clinical assessment) Please specify:			

**SOURCE:**

Lach, H. W., Reed, A. T., Smith, L. J. & Carr, D. B. (1995). Alzheimer's disease: Assessing safety problems in the home. *Geriatric Nursing, 16*(4), 160-164. Table 1, p. 161.

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