

POISONINGS

Poisoning is the second greatest health risk for seniors after falls. In the general population 32 percent of deaths occurring at home or in the community are due to poisoning.

Poisonings can result from ingestion, breathing of toxic gases or skin absorption

Most poisonings are the result of ingestion of non-lethal substances or mixtures.

Overdoses of over-the-counter, prescription and illicit drugs – is now the fastest- rising cause of accidental death with a 5 percent increase in last year alone.

Know the number for the Poison Control Center 1-800-222-1222. Call them if you suspect poisoning. The call is free.

Medications

- Mismanagement of medications is a primary cause of poisoning among seniors.
- According to the National Safety Council most seniors take multiple medications for a variety of ailments and some suffer from drug interaction so read the literature and consult the doctor or pharmacist on multiple drug use.
- Consult a doctor before mixing over-the-counter drugs, prescribed medications and herbal supplements.
- About 75 percent of the elderly do not take the correct dosage.
- Don't mix alcohol and medications that could lead to liver failure or other problems.
- Do not drive if you take medications that cause dizziness - it may result in a crash.
- Wear your glasses and turn the light on so you can see what you are taking.
- The Cancer Treatment Center of America provides tips for medication management.
- When receiving a new drug or a dosage change look for adverse reactions for a week.
- Utilize a pill box that has compartments for days and time of days.
- The Red Cross advises that the medicine cabinet should be cleaned out periodically and unneeded and medicine past their expiration date should be safely discarded.
- Do not borrow prescription medicine from someone else.
- To get a free packet of poison prevention publications, write to Poison Prevention Packet, CPSC, and Washington, DC 20207 or visit the Poison Prevention Week Council Web site.

Carbon Monoxide

Carbon Monoxide is an odorless colorless gas that is produced by incomplete combustion of fuels. Even brief exposure can be fatal. Install a carbon monoxide detector near your home's sleeping area. Install it according to instructions and change the batteries twice a year. If the alarm goes off get out of the house immediately. Symptoms of CO Poisoning are headache, dizziness, sleepiness, nausea, vomiting and confusion.

Every year, storms and power outages leave carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning deaths in their wake. Increased use of gas powered generators provides electricity during power outages but they must be operated outside and the exhaust pipe should not be positioned to allow entry of CO gas into the living area. Do not operate generators in the garage attached to the house.

Do not run a car, lawnmower, propane camping equipment or charcoal grills in the garage because the carbon monoxide may drift into the home.

Do not use the gas oven to heat the home during a power outage.

Improperly operating furnaces and water heaters are also sources of CO. The flame should be blue in color so if it is yellow or orange it is burning improperly and a furnace maintenance person should be called. Have the furnace and water heaters checked before every heating season.

Radon

Following smoking Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer.

Radon is an odorless colorless gas that is formed by the natural radioactive decay in rock, soil and water. The gas will seep into basements usually through cracks in the wall or floor, sump pits, crawl spaces and drains.

It is necessary to test the air to determine if the level is too high. For more information, or to order a low-cost test kit call the National Radon Hotline at 800-767-7236.

Hazardous Materials

Most homes have paints, paint thinner, lawn fertilizers, weed killers, solvents, oven cleaners and other chemicals. It is important to read the labels thoroughly and to use them in accordance with the directions and discard them properly.

It is also important that the chemicals and materials be kept in their original containers.

Most household chemicals can be replaced by five common, inexpensive substances to wash, bleach, disinfect sanitize and repel insects. The alternative products are plain soap, borax, baking soda, vinegar and ammonia.

There are times when one might think that mixing cleaning chemicals will do a better job than using one of them alone. This could be a fatal mistake. Almost yearly a person decides to mix bleach with an ammonia product such as one of the many dish washer liquid soaps. The result is chloramines gas. Bleach combined with an acidic product such as vinegar will produce chlorine gas. Both can cause a strong irritation of the respiratory system and in some instances death.

Lead

Most exposure comes from lead-based paint that was used in homes built before 1978. Lead-contaminated dust is produced by friction of painted window frames going up and down or when sanding or scraping for repainting. If you suspect you have a problem hire a sampling technician and test before commencing with sanding and scraping. Wear a respirator rated for lead exposure and keep others out of the room.

Food borne illness

According to the Centers for Disease and Control Prevention food contamination causes 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths each year.

Contamination results from improper storage or preparation.

Thaw food in the refrigerator, in a microwave or under running water. Never on the kitchen counter. Do not let thawing juices drip on other food in the refrigerator. Wash all fresh fruits and vegetables before preparation or eating them.

Plastic cutting boards are better than wood because the small cuts in the wood may contain bacteria. Use one board for fruits and vegetables and another for meat, poultry and fish.

Use a cooking thermometer to ensure proper cooking.

Leftovers last 3-4 days. For a more complete listing of storage times call (800) INFO-FDA. The meat and Poultry hotline is (800) 535-4555 and on line www.cfsan.fda.gov.

Food that causes illness often doesn't smell taste or appear unusual. But if you have vomiting, diarrhea, sharp abdominal pain, cramps headache or sweating. Visit a doctor because there may be strong toxins involved.