

Healthy Indoor Environments

Where We Live, Learn and Play

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Minimize Fall Hazards During the Holidays

Written by Nicole Walters, FACS Agent, UGA Extension Monroe County

As the holiday glows and decorations begin to fill your home it is important to consider what areas or items in your home may be potential fall risks during the holiday season. While falling can be serious for any age group, eliminating hazards is especially important for those over the age of 65. According to the CDC, one in four adults over the age of 65 experience a fall each year. Once an individual falls their chances of falling again doubles.



Image: Creative Commons

The range of injuries from falls is wide. A fall can result in less serious injuries like cuts, bruises and soreness, which require a short recovery time. However, some falls can lead to serious injuries like fractures, broken bones, and head trauma. It is reported, that serious injuries occur in one of every five falls. The CDC states that the leading cause of traumatic brain injury is related to falls. Not only are the injuries associated with some falls significant, but they can also be costly to the individual. Serious injuries may require surgery, rehabilitation or physical therapy resulting in a financial burden to the individual and their family. Loss of independence to the individual can occur requiring a temporary and sometimes permanent caregiver for the individual.

There are things you can do to minimize fall hazards in your home. During the holiday season, some things that contribute to falls in the home are:

- ◇ Dimly lit areas
- ◇ Exposed electrical cords
- ◇ Rearrangement of items and furniture from their usual placing to accommodate holiday decorations making a space unfamiliar
- ◇ Narrower walkways due to holiday decorations
- ◇ Holiday wrapping, boxes, gifts, and other clutter scattered around you home
- ◇ Addition of small holiday rugs, throws or pillows that can create trip hazards
- ◇ Winter clothing like boots, gloves, hats and coats may clutter the walkways

In addition to holiday-related clutter, there may be other potential tripping and falling hazards in your home.

- ◇ Unnecessary furniture that hinders ease of movement
- ◇ Low profile furniture, like coffee tables
- ◇ Rugs or floor coverings that are not secured to the floor
- ◇ Pets in areas with elderly or mobility restricted family members
- ◇ Uneven flooring/steps
- ◇ Bulky thresholds as floor coverings transition
- ◇ Poorly fitting shoes or socks
- ◇ Stacks of mail, magazines, or books

Being mindful of these potential fall hazards and eliminating them as much as possible will help create a healthy home this holiday season and throughout the upcoming year.

Source: [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](https://www.cdc.gov)

Home Safety Checklist		UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA EXTENSION		
Stairways & Porches				
Are the stairs well lighted?	Yes	No	Does Not Apply	
Do all indoor stairways have light switches at the top and bottom?				
Are there sturdy handrails for all steps and stairways?				
Are the steps and stairs in good condition?				
Are there sturdy guard rails on all porches and decks?				
Are porch (seals) in good condition?				
Are the stairways a non-slippery surface?				
Living Room & Family Areas				
Are the floors a non-slippery surface?	Yes	No	Does Not Apply	
Do all throw rugs have non-skid backing?				
Are carpets firmly attached to the floor?				
Is the furniture in good repair and safe to use?				
Are the traffic areas free from all cords (electrical, cable, etc.)?				
Are hallways free from clutter?				
Are hallways well lighted?				
Does the room have lighting that doesn't produce glare?				
Is there a screen in front of the fireplace?				
Are electric/gas space heaters at least 3 feet away from curtains, furniture, and other combustible objects?				
Are electric/gas space heaters placed on non-flammable surfaces and out of traffic paths?				
Are electric and gas space heaters placed where they can't easily fall over?				
Are gas space heaters properly vented?				

The UGA Extension [Home Safety Checklist](#) is a helpful way to make your home safer.

Have a Happy and Safe Home this Holiday Season

Written by Leigh Anne Aaron, FACS Agent, UGA Extension Morgan/Oconee Counties



Image Source: Canva

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, more than 13,000 people are treated annually in emergency rooms nationwide during November and December from injuries related to holiday decorations. Following these simple safety tips will help to keep you and your home happy and safe during the holidays.

Decorating your house inside and out is one of the best ways to get in the holiday spirit. Nearly 90% of families decorate their homes for the holidays, according to the Electrical Safety Foundation International. If done correctly, decorations can add a magical touch to your entire home, but if not, it can be the beginning of a disaster.

Before you begin, check the condition of your ladder. Select the correct ladder for the job. Ladders should extend at least 3 feet over the roofline or working surface. Place the ladder on level and firm ground. Use leg levelers under the ladder to level uneven surfaces or soft ground. These are available at your local hardware store. Check the maximum load rating to ensure the ladder can take both the weight of the climber and what they are carrying. Set up straight, single, or extension ladders at about a 75-degree angle. Wear slip-resistant shoes. Always have a helper hold the bottom of the ladder and only allow one person on the ladder at a time. Be sure to put your ladder away when you are finished.

If you are decorating with lights, ensure you have an adequate number of outlets, and the lights have been tested for safety. Look for certification marks that read “UT”, “ETL”, and “CSA”. When possible, use LED lights. These bulbs run at a cooler temperature than regular bulbs and are more energy-efficient. According to the National Fire Protection Association, there are about 780 house fires each year that begin from holiday decorations. Inspect holiday lights and extension cords before decorating. Replace any that are fraying or damaged. Pay special attention to lights, cords or decorations that may have been damaged from winter weather conditions. When putting up lights, don’t nail or staple through the electrical cords. It could crack around the wiring that could lead to shock or electrical fire. Remember to turn off your lights when you are not home and while you are sleeping.

When decorating inside your home, a live and fresh tree needs to be at least 3 feet away from heaters and fireplaces. Live trees need to be watered daily to prevent them from drying out. If you notice the needles on your tree are withered and brittle, remove decorations as soon as possible and remove the tree from your home.

Other holiday tips:

- ◇ Keep potentially poisonous plants like mistletoe, holly berries, Jerusalem cherry, poinsettia, and amaryllis away from children and pets.
- ◇ Candles can be a nice touch to holiday decorations, but are also the cause of house fires. Faux candles give the same gentle effect of a candle without the chance of starting a fire.
- ◇ Fireplaces are a great focal point for holiday decorating and can be admired with proper precautions. Only decorate fireplaces with flame-retardant decorations and keep gift boxes or wrapped packages away when a fire is burning.

Finally, make an emergency plan to use if a fire breaks out anywhere in the home. See that each family member knows what to do. **PRACTICE THE PLAN!** By taking the proper precautions both inside and outside of your home, you can prevent hazards and focus on friends and family during the holidays. Remember to periodically check lights and decorations throughout the season to ensure they continue to operate safely.

Take Control of the Air You Breathe

Written by Becca Stackhouse, FACS Agent, UGA Extension Crisp County

When cleaning a bedroom, bathroom or kitchen, you may choose products with familiar scents that invoke pleasant memories. However, that good smell may be accompanied by unwanted chemicals. For some people, fragrances can cause medical issues like migraines, asthma attacks, or other breathing difficulties. To avoid fragrances in household cleaning products and air fresheners, purchase fragrance-free products or try one of the tips below to make your air smell fresh.



Image Source: Pixabay

- ◇ Increase ventilation by opening a window to let fresh air into the space.
- ◇ Add dry eucalyptus branches or mint to bring a distinct aroma to the room.
- ◇ Spray a fine mist of white or cider vinegar to lesson odors from tobacco smoke or cooking.
- ◇ Place a carton of baking soda in the refrigerator and freezer to absorb smells.
- ◇ Add a fragrant aroma by boiling a mixture of slices of fresh lemon or orange with cloves, cinnamon, or other spices in a pot on your stove. Save the mixture to use again by cooling it down, pouring it into a glass jar, and refrigerating.
- ◇ Refresh the couch by combining baking soda, water, and a few pieces of orange peel in a spray bottle and spritz away. Remember, don't get the furniture too wet.
- ◇ Make a gel air freshener by dissolving 1 cup of water, 2 packs of unflavored gelatin and 1 tablespoon salt in a pan on the stove. Add 4 drops of lemon juice or essential oils after you take it off the stove. Pour into 4-ounce (small) glass jars. Let the air freshener set up. Uncover it to release the scent, and cover it to prevent from drying when not in use.

These are just a few ways you can take control of the air you breathe. Have fun noticing smells and experimenting with ways to freshen your indoor air.

Healthy Home Hacks

~ Dana Carney, FACS Agent, UGA Extension Lanier County

Tidy up one item at a time. Every time you get up or go to a different room pick up items and put them away. This will help make big messes seem less overwhelming!

Use timers to turn lights on and off. This helps save energy and money on your electricity bill.

Add Velcro to the back of TV remotes to keep them in one place.

Change your ceiling fan direction. When the weather starts cooling off, changing the ceiling fan to a clockwise direction will create an updraft and help distribute warmer air.

Hook trash bag handles on removable hooks on the side of your trash can. This helps keep bags in place and prevents spills.

Giving Back to the Environment: Tree Recycling

Written by Candace Tucker, FACS Agent, UGA Extension Coweta County



Image Source: Oleg Zaicev from Pexels

There is nothing like having a live tree to decorate in your home for the holidays. The festive aroma alone provides a nostalgic feel for many. However, once the holidays have come and gone, the next order of business is disposing of your tree. For most people, the first thing that may come to mind is to add it to their weekly trash pickup to go to the landfill. While this may seem like a good idea, it is environmentally destructive. When your tree is sent to the landfill, it is packed tightly with other garbage, where it cannot decompose properly. In turn, this causes the tree to release methane gas that is harmful to the environment.

So, what other options are out there? To give your tree life beyond the holidays, here are some ways to recycle and repurpose your tree to give back to mother nature.

1. **Check out your local options.** Contact your city, county, local waste management company, nearby garden center, local conservation organization or local non-profit organizations to find out if they offer tree recycling. Many organizations will either pick up your tree or provide you with information on a drop-off site.
2. **Make mulch or compost.** The wood and pine needles from your tree can be turned into mulch or compost to be used around your yard. Pine needles are full of nutrients that can lower the PH of your soil if it is more alkaline. Also, mulch can keep your trees and plants healthy by keeping them moist during the cold, winter months. Another plus is that it controls soil erosion.
3. **Create a pond or wildlife habitat.** Provide a sanctuary for fish, birds and other wildlife. When placed on the bottom of a lake or pond, your tree becomes a place of shelter and food for fish. If you do not have a pond or lake on your property, contact local officials to see if there is a pond or lake where you can place your tree. Birds can find shelter in trees placed on your yard or land. You can tie bird feed, orange slices, popcorn and other treats fit for birds to the branches. Be sure to remove all decorations before using your tree as an outdoor habitat.
4. **Spread tree ash in your garden.** If you decide to burn the wood from your tree, the ashes can be spread in your garden. Among other nutrients, wood ash contains potassium and lime, which helps plants flourish. Be aware that sap and dried needles tend to crackle, pop and explode when they burn. Fir, pine and spruce trees contain a flammable tar called creosote, which produces soot and can lead to chimney fires. You should not burn your tree indoors and only burn it outside if allowed in your county. Check before burning anything.
5. **Reuse in your home.** If you want that fresh pine smell past the holidays, store the tree needles (only if they are still green) in sachets or paper bags to use as fresheners. The tree trunk can be cut and used for coasters, risers, and other home décor. The trick is to let the tree dry completely before cutting and to varnish the wood before

For more information on keeping your home healthy, visit
www.georgiahealthyhousing.org

HOW 'BOUT THOSE MASKS?



- › Wash your cloth mask after every use.
- › Remove detachable parts prior to washing.
- › Wash your hands after handling a soiled mask.
- › Machine wash is acceptable.
- › Air dry in the sun or turn dryer to the hottest setting.
- › Keep a variety of masks to rotate and some in your vehicle.
- › Store in plastic bag to avoid contaminating other items.
- › **Most importantly, wear a mask to protect yourself and loved ones.**








Safe at Home: Preventing Lung Cancer

BY REDUCING RADON IN THE HOME

What is radon? Radon is a gas that you cannot see, smell or taste. It comes from the decay of radioactive elements (such as uranium, thorium and radium) in soil and groundwater.

What are your chances for getting lung cancer from radon? Each one of the following influences your risk:

1. Level of radon in your home;
2. The amount of time you spend in your home;
3. If you are a smoker of tobacco or have ever smoked tobacco; and
4. If you are exposed to secondhand smoke.

Why should I be concerned about radon? Breathing in radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking. Radon is the likely cause of more than 21,000 lung cancer deaths each year in the U.S. In 2015, lung cancer was the leading cause of cancer deaths in Georgia.

How does radon cause lung cancer? Radon gas decays into radioactive particles that can get trapped in your lungs when you breathe. These particles break down and release small bursts of energy. This can damage lung tissue and lead to lung cancer over the course of your lifetime. Not everyone exposed to high levels of radon will develop lung cancer, however the risk for lung cancer is increased.

January is National Radon Action Month. Test your home. For a test kit visit radon.uga.edu/

Want to learn more about keeping children safe and healthy in ECE?

Healthy Environments for Early Care and Education Online Learning Modules

Topics (1 hour of ECE credit each)

- Keep Me Lead Free!
- Injury Prevention and Control
- Water Safety and Quality
- Asthma
- Radon
- Emergency Management in ECE
- (More topics coming soon)

bit.ly/GAHealthyEnvtsECE



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