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Nov. 6?12: National Senior Safety Week

Today there is 747,000 Canadians living with Alzheimer's and other dementias. That is 14.9 per cent of Canadians 65 and older and by 2031 that number is expected to increase to 1.4 million.

Home is an important place for everyone and even more so for people with Alzheimer's and other dementias. A familiar environment can help a person connect with the past and maintain a sense of who they are. People with dementia can become lost even in familiar places so it's important to strike a balance between safety and independence. Here are some home safety tips to make your home safe and dementia-friendly for all.

? Have fire extinguishers, smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors tested regularly to make sure they're working.

? Use appliance that have an automatic shut off feature and keep them away from sinks and other sources of water.

? Use child proof locks and doorknob covers on drawers and cupboards that contain dangerous material such as knives, cleaning liquids and appliances.

? Store dangerous equipment like grills, lawn mowers, power tools and knives in a secure place.

? Lock any hazardous areas or cover the doors or locks so that they are disguised. Place locks either high or low on doors to make them less obvious.

? Remove locks in bathrooms or bedrooms to prevent the person with dementia from being locked inside.

? If you are concerned about someone using the stove, install a hidden gas valve or circuit breaker that prevents it from being turned on. Consider removing the knobs from the burners.

? Remove all toxic plants or decorative fruits that the person might mistakenly try to eat.

? Remove all medications or other substances from open areas such as the kitchen table and counters, including vitamins and prescription drugs. Even sugar, sugar substitutes and seasonings may pose a risk to the individual. Keep medications in a locked area.

? Supervise the person when using tobacco or alcohol as these may have harmful side effects and interact with certain prescription medication. Always supervise the person with dementia if they are a smoker. They may forget a burning cigarette and start a fire.

? Check the temperature of water and food as the person may have difficulty telling the difference. This applies to bath water and hot food.

? Install safety equipment in the bathroom. Grab bars are great for preventing falls.

? Add non-slip stickers to slippery surfaces such as tile floors and loose rugs. Or remove rugs completely.

? Use contrasting colours at the beginning of a staircase, for example, making steps and transitions easier to see. Avoid dark rugs as they may appear to be a hole.

? Install good lighting at entries, outside landings, between rooms, on stairways and in bathrooms.

? Keep emergency numbers by the phone for quick access.

? Remember that symbols like skull, crossbones, ?toxic? and ?poison? lose their meaning.

? Consult an occupational therapist for additional safety tips on how to make your home as safe and accommodating as possible.

? Some areas of your home may pose more risks than others. Pay extra attention to garages, work spaces, basements and outdoor areas.

Consider registering the person with dementia and MedicAlert Safely Home. This is a bracelet identification program that helps emergency responders identify the person who is lost and return them safely home.

Whether you are a family caregiver, paid caregiver or volunteer, caring for someone with dementia can be overwhelming at times. There are many agencies and services in the community that can help you in your role while taking care of your own well being. These can be found through the Alzheimer's Society, your family doctor, health clinic or social worker or the local public health department.

The Alzheimer Society of Canada is the leading nationwide health charity for people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Active in communities across Canada, the Society offers help for today through their programs and services. To learn more or find the local Alzheimer Society visit www.alzheimer.ca

By Michelle Janzen