

# TAKING TIME

by **Rebecca Wolf**

Extension Home Economist



## Safety Tips For Seniors

Three or four times each year I tape educational programs for our local PBS station. In January, I prepared materials on the financial strains of retirement. Did you know that retirees can expect their medical and health insurance costs to increase thirty percent from pre-retirement levels during their later years?

By taking some basic precautions, you may be able to save yourself or one of your parents

some medical costs. You may also avoid undue pain and injury.

Many seniors spend much of their day in the home. "Safety begins at home" because accidents also begin at home. Arthritis and vision changes, two common physical conditions in aging, affect the way adults function. Some simple additions and alterations may help you to compensate for this natural part of aging.

Except for a sudden injury, people generally adapt to these changes gradually. Because the

changes come slowly, over time, we may overlook some simple safety precautions. But we need to follow safety tips and encourage older family members to do the same. Each year home accidents injure about 25 million people. Taking time now to make your home safer really is important.

Consider how these items may improve the safety in your kitchen:

- A sturdy step stool. Sit whenever possible to work, using a lapboard across an open drawer.

- A plastic half-gallon milk container (or a handle that slips over a paper carton) that makes it easier to carry and pour a beverage.

- Tongs to extend your reach and a long oven mitt to protect your hands and lower arms from burns.

- Land-handled dust pan and brush, a nonslip rubber gripper, and a one-handed food chopper (with a knob at the top) simplify

daily tasks.

- Shadow-free lighting which improves ability to see clearly.

- Light-weight dishes on lower shelves which can be selected and moved with ease.

- Kitchen racks, mounted on pantry doors or placed on cupboard shelves, that help organize space and may improve a person's access to needed items.

- A fire extinguisher that you know how to use.

Remove throw rugs or other clutter that may cause a person to stumble or slip. You may have placed small rugs in your bathroom or bedroom. Make sure to remove these or fasten them securely to the floor. It's very easy to catch a shoe on the edge and tumble into a piece of furniture. Remember, too, your furnishings are aging with you. Have you checked the electrical cords on lamps and appliances? Any wires

that seemed frayed pose a grave fire hazard. Replace them. Ask a family member or friend to help you.

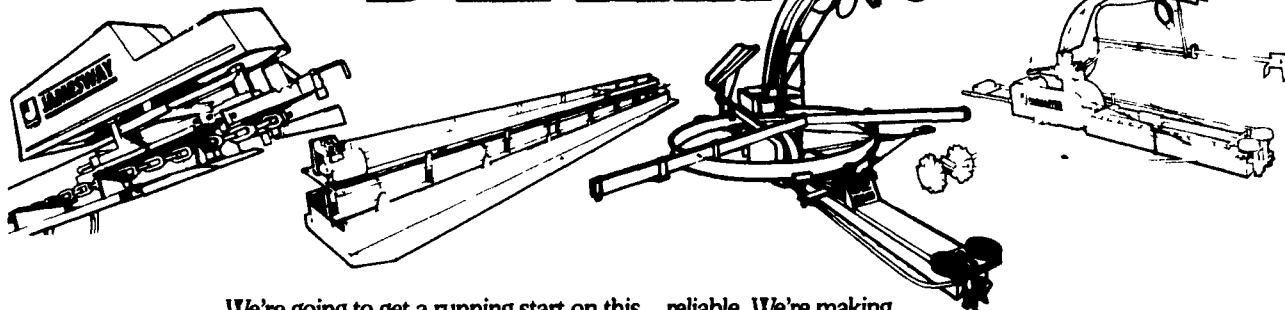
We'd like to believe that our roads and farms are safe. This, unfortunately is not always true. To increase your safety, make sure you have adequate lighting near your home's entrance and over any walkways. Also, consider having a phone in the bedroom. This gives you quick access to police in case of emergency. It also keeps you from hurrying into the hallway or down a flight of steps in the middle of the night to answer a call.

During the winter months, it is okay to enjoy some outdoor exercise, but remember to always layer clothing. Loose, layered clothing traps more air and keeps your body at a safe temperature.

These are just a few ideas that may improve your safety. Ignoring the unsafe areas in and around your home puts you at financial and physical risk. Take some time this week to make a few changes — for yourself or for those people you care about who may benefit. This is a gift of time that will pay for itself!

Rebecca Wolf is a Home Economist with Penn State Cooperative Extension in Lehigh County.

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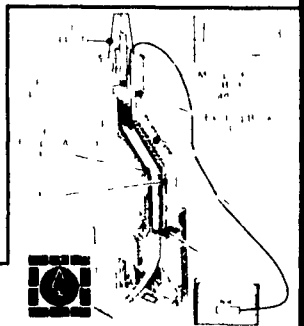
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