



## Caregiver's Answers, Topics, and Helpful Information

In an effort to continually assist caregivers in their search for pertinent information regarding eldercare, our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator addresses topics of most frequently asked questions via Caregiver's Answers, Topics and Helpful Information (CATHI). Additionally, caregivers are also invited to e-mail individual questions to the Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at [caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org](mailto:caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org).

### **Before It's Too Late: Planning for an Emergency**

If you are caring for a loved one, knowing how to evacuate a loved one or how a loved one can take shelter during an emergency may not be as easy as just stepping out a door, or crawling out a window, especially if your loved one has mobility challenges and physical issues. Not only do you have to consider how you yourself will get out of the house during an emergency, but how will your loved one be able to get out. It is also critical if you care for a loved one with Alzheimer's, whose impairments in memory and reasoning severely limit their ability to act appropriately in a crisis. There are just a few questions that a caregiver will need to consider in order to arrive at a much-needed safety plan for their loved one.

Once you have created a safety plan, it is important to rehearse the plan with you and your loved one, making sure that there are no other problems that arise during an emergency. You should share the plan with other family members once it is finalized, who may not live with you, as well as neighbors, friends, and any other personal care attendants that may be part of the in-home caregiving team. By doing this, it will allow people other than the caregiver to know where to locate the individual in a timely manner and assist with anything they may need in that moment, should their primary caregiver not be able to do so.

When you begin to create your in-home, emergency preparedness plan, a good resource to be in contact with is your local chapter of the Red Cross. They can tell what kind of natural disasters occur in your area, how to prepare for each, and how you will be warned of those emergencies. Also, many communities extend special assistance to those who have mobility problems by registering those people with a local fire department or emergency management office. Professional help will then be administered quickly and with priority in an emergency to people with physical limitations and mobility challenges.

If you are caregiver who works outside of the home, you need to find out your workplace emergency plan. For example, some places will not allow employees to leave for home until an "all clear" has been given by local authorities, so caregivers need to take a policy like this into consideration when creating an at-home safety plan for a loved one. Also, if you currently use

an in-home service from an agency or privately pay, find out whether the agency has special provisions during an emergency; will they continue to provide care and services at another location if your loved one needs to be evacuated from their current environment? Even though it can be a lot of work it is important to determine what will be needed for each type of emergency.

For example, most individuals head for their basements during a tornado warning, however, most basements are not wheelchair accessible. In this scenario, what modifications will you need to make, or will you be able to utilize an alternative shelter that is easier for your loved one to get to? Another good idea is for you to create more than one exit for a loved one who is confined to a wheelchair, in case the primary exit of your home is blocked in a disaster. In case there is a power outage, make sure you know how to connect or start a loved one's back-up power supply that may be needed for important medical equipment. Make sure to teach others who might assist your loved one in an emergency how to operate this type of equipment as well. It is also good to know which emergency shelters near your home and are wheelchair accessible.

If your loved one lives on their own in an apartment complex, be sure to ask the building's management to identify and mark all the accessible exits. It is also a good idea to arrange for a relative or neighbor to check on your loved one should they live on their own. Make sure all emergency phone numbers are posted near their phone, saved in cell phones, and/or kept in wallets or pocketbooks at all times. It would not hurt to select one out-of-state and one local friend or relative for you or your loved one to call if you are separated in a disaster. It is also a good idea to select one place near your home to meet-up together in case of a fire, and another place to meet outside your neighborhood in case you cannot return home after a disaster.

If you are at home when a disaster strikes, know how to quickly access and turnoff the water, gas, and electricity at main values or switches. If your loved one is able to do so, it is a good idea that they also know how to turn these things off as well, should they be home by themselves when disaster strikes. Preparing for a disaster supply kit is a MUST when you are caring for a loved one whose life may depend upon certain medications and other such items. When is it appropriate, some of these things can be stored in easy-to-carry containers like backpacks or duffel bags. Larger items like a wheelchair or back-up equipment may be stored in a "safe-room" in your house or at a neighbor's house, school, or workplace.

### **Emergency Care List**

- A battery-powered radio, flashlight, and plenty of extra batteries.
- A first-aid kit, prescription medicines, and an extra pair of glasses.
- A supply of water (one gallon per person per day); store water in sealed, unbreakable containers and replace every six months; a supply on non-perishable food and a non-electric can opener, plus any special foods your loved one may require.

- Include extra products like adult diapers, wipes, lotions, and other hygiene items that do not water in order to use.
- Have extra wheelchair batteries charged and ready to go.
- Have on-hand full oxygen tanks, extra medications, catheters, food for guide service dogs, and any other special equipment needed.
- A change of clothing and rain gear for your loved and sturdy shoes for you.
- Extra blankets and sleeping bags.
- The list of family physicians, relatives or friends who should be notified if you or your loved one are injured.
- A list of the style and serial numbers of medical devices such as pacemakers or spherical batter for essential medical equipment.
- An extra set of car keys.

During a disaster, anything that can move, fall, break or cause a fire is considered to be an added hazard. Before an emergency situation happens, it is a good idea to go around your home and look specially for items that might pose a danger to you and your loved one during a disaster. Make sure shelves are securely fastened to the walls, and that any large, heavy objects are placed on lower shelves or on the floor. Also, hang pictures and mirrors away from beds; larger pictures or mirrors should be bolted to the wall.

Obstructed electrical wiring around your home, and repair any wires found to be defective or hazardous. Have a shut-off valve or switch for oxygen equipment near your loved one's bed or chair, so they (or you) can turn it off quickly if there is a fire. It is a good idea to secure your water heater by strapping it to a nearby wall in order to keep it from falling over during a disaster. Repair cracks found in the ceilings or foundation and brace overhead light fixtures. If you have a chimney, have a professional inspect it for any cracks or weak spots, and have the appropriate repairs made. Invest in fire extinguishers and smoke detectors.

There are many things that caregivers can do to help themselves and their loves ones prepare for any type of emergency or disaster, but it is best to be ready well in advance, before a dire situation arises. Remember to contact your local fire department or your community's emergency management office for help with your preparations.

Senior Resources of Guilford will have a Caregiver Lunch and Learn Series on September 27<sup>th</sup> at 12:30 to discuss how to be prepared in an Emergency. Call 336-373-4816 for more details or to register.

This article was adapted from *Before It's Too late: Planning For an Emergency* by Hillary Gibson

***\*If you would like to join our mailing list to learn more about programs and services available to you contact our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at:***  
***[caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org](mailto:caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org)***

For referrals to community organizations in Guilford County that assist older adults and caregivers, contact Senior Resources of Guilford's SeniorLine at (336) 884-6981 in High Point, all other areas (336) 333-6981 or the Caregiver Support Coordinator, at (336) 373-4816 in Greensboro or (336) 883-3586 in High Point.



North Carolina Family Caregiver Support Program  
Completing the Care