Your Healthy Home: Safety Tips for the Holidays I

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Can you believe it? The holidays are here! Why is it when you are a small child Christmas and your birthday take 48 months to roll around again? Or so it seems. Now, as adults, your birthday and the holidays take 4 months to roll around again. Or so it seems!

The holidays are a good time to talk about safety in your home. With the rush on, so much to do, and guests arriving, it's easy to overlook small things that can make a difference to our health and well being. Here are some tips to keep you and your loved ones safe. Let's begin with the kitchen.

The kitchen is a wonderful place with coziness and mouth watering aromas, and the kitchen is definitely the place to be during the holidays, with food tasting, treats, warmth, and good cheer. The kitchen can also be dangerous. Most home fires start in the kitchen, most people who show up in emergency rooms with serious cuts get them in the kitchen, and nearly all burns are a result of an accident in the kitchen. So consider the following tips:

Be sensible with knives. Keep them sharp so they don't slip, and keep them in a holder, not loose in drawers. If you drop one, let it go! Don't pull the knife towards you when cutting - if it slips it may cut you. Cut away from you, and think while you're cutting. Most of us reading this have had a careless moment we'd rather not repeat. In spite of what you read, humans really can only concentrate on one task at a time (try telling that to a texting teenager). In the kitchen we have to be careful with everything that is going on and keep our focus.

Fires. Keep a fire extinguisher somewhere handy. If you don't have one, go to one of the home improvement stores to get an all purpose extinguisher. Murphy's Law says if you have one, you won't need it. Watch what you're cooking to make sure it doesn't overheat or get forgotten. When you place a hot pot on the counter, put a potholder over it or its utensil to let others know it's still hot. Verse your children in kitchen safety, especially the hot pots and surfaces.

The range. All ranges manufactured in the last 18 years are required to have anti-tip brackets installed. These are metal devices designed to prevent freestanding ranges from tipping forward. They are normally attached to a rear leg of the range or screwed into the wall behind the range, and are included in all installation kits. A unit that is not equipped with an anti-tip

bracket may fall forward if enough weight is applied to its open door, such as that from a large Thanksgiving turkey, or a small child. A falling range can crush, scald, or burn anyone who is caught under it. As a home inspector, this is one of the items I check for on my inspections. And guess what? 80% of the time these brackets are missing. I attribute this to the installer not wanting to go to the extra effort to put this bracket in. To find out if your range is missing a bracket, simply grasp the rear top panel area of the range and try to tip it towards you. It should not tip up. If your range is missing a bracket, you can buy one in any home improvement store. If your home is fairly new, look through all the "stuff" the builder gave you when you moved in - the bracket might still be sitting in a plastic pouch with the instruction manual! If you're handy, you can install this yourself.

Electrical cords. Unplug appliances in the kitchen when you're not using them. Check the cords for fraying. Don't overload the circuits. Don't run extension cords from somewhere else in the house into the kitchen - yes, people do this - they can trip someone and knock what its powering over, spilling contents. It can also overload circuits, raising the potential for fire. Be careful using appliances near the sink. If something you're operating falls into water, step away and let the ground fault circuit cut the power to the outlet powering the appliance. Check to see if your kitchen has GFCI protected outlets - if you are not sure what these are, ask someone to help you. These circuits have been required in kitchens since 1987 and will save your life if you drop an electrical appliance into a sink of water and you're still touching it.