



Winter Warmth

Winter's on the way, and it's important to stay warm! [Seniors have more trouble keeping warm than others](#), due to a lower metabolic rate, so they may be extra sensitive to dips in temperature. Moreover, they may not be as *aware* of becoming cold as they did in the past. Fortunately, it's a simple task to keep an eye on heating appliances and practice some basic safety to ensure they keep warm.

What kind of shape is their furnace in?

Helping them to schedule a furnace checkup is a easy way to cross off what's probably the top item on the list. Simply check the phone book or do a quick internet search to find an HVAC expert in your area. This tune up and cleaning typically costs about \$60 to \$85 on average, but since cleaning the heating system improves efficiency, this can actually save money in the long run.

If you are up for a project, changing a furnace filter is a fairly straightforward process that you both could do together. A four-inch filter will need to be changed every two months; a five-inch one, every three months.

Here are some steps to help identify which filter their furnace has and how to install a new one:

1. Turn off the furnace.
2. Remove the existing filter, which is located just inside the furnace or inside the air return vent.
3. Look for an arrow on the filter indicating which direction the air flows, and use a sticky note or permanent marker to mark the direction of the airflow on the exterior of the furnace. (This way you'll always know the correct way to install the filter.)
4. Check the filter size on the cardboard frame, so you'll know which replacement to buy.
5. Once you've purchased the new filter, look for the markings that indicate which side should face the furnace. Slide it into place, put the cover back, and make a note of the date, so you'll know when to change it again.

Also, it's a good idea to go over basic safety procedures with them involving winter warmth. It's worth stressing that space heaters can be extremely dangerous and are not recommended. If they are interested in a backup heating system, they should look for alternatives to space heaters. Extra blankets are a must in case of emergency, and if they use an electric blanket, make sure they know how to use it correctly.

While focused on child safety, the **American Academy of Pediatrics has an excellent list of [basic fireplace safety tips](#) that can still apply to adults.** These include keeping windows cracked while a fire is lit, cleaning out ashes, making sure the flue is open while a fire is burning, removing flammable materials from around the fireplace, and choosing the correct wood to use.

Over 400 people are killed each year from unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning, and as many as 15,000 end up in the emergency room. Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas that is colorless, tasteless and odorless, but it can build up fast as a by-product of appliances and heaters. It's essential that CO detectors are installed- simply buy one that meets the [UL standard 2034](#) and plug it in. It's also necessary to have a handy safety checklist for all carbon-monoxide-related matters, which can be found [here](#).