



Earthquake Safety for the Disabled & the Elderly

This section addresses both the disabled and the elderly because their needs are often similar. Of course, people with disabilities are of all ages, and both this section and that on children can be applied to children with disabilities.

- Before an earthquake
- During an earthquake
- After an earthquake

Before An Earthquake

Eliminate Hazards:

If you cannot take cover, you must make sure that there is nothing that could fall on you. This is particularly important for wherever you spend a great deal of time – your bed, desk or work area. Besides the possibility of injury, fallen debris could make it difficult for you to walk or move a wheelchair, making evacuation impossible.

Special equipment such as telephones and life support systems should be securely fastened down. Tanks of gas such as oxygen should be belted in place with two chains bolted to the wall. If tanks of gas are knocked over and the valves damaged, they can propel themselves around the room like missiles.

Stock Additional Supplies:

In addition to regular earthquake supplies, stock other supplies that are essential to your safety and comfort. Maintain at least a week's supply. Always carry a card with your name, address and essential medical information.

Additional supplies to keep at your bedside, at work and with your wheelchair:

- Police whistle or loud bell to signal others if you are trapped
- Flashlight
- Extra medication, medical supplies and equipment such as bladder pads, catheters, hearing aid, batteries, pencils and papers, particularly for the hearing impaired to communicate with persons who don't know sign language, and copies of prescriptions and other items for your particular situation.

Plan At Work:

If you rely on elevators to get into your work place, emergency evacuation could be a real challenge. There should be two accessible emergency exits and a realistic evacuation plan. Encourage disaster response preparation discussions at work, and make sure that such plans consider persons with disabilities.

Practice the Buddy System:

There should be at least two buddies willing to help you at work, and you should try to find two or more at home. These buddies should be willing to check on you after any emergency or disaster, and to assist you when needed. Most people are happy to help, but they need to know what to do:

- First explain to them that you are getting prepared for an earthquake or other disaster, and encourage them to do the same.
- Tell them about your special needs and concern.
- Familiarize them with any equipment you use. For example, show them how your wheelchair works, whether the arms come off, and how to go up or down a curb.
- Let them know of any particular harm that untrained help might cause.
- Invite your neighbourhood buddies into your home to let them

- become familiar with the layout and the location of supplies.
- Give a key to a trusted friend.

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During an Earthquake

You are advised to take cover. The greatest danger is from falling objects. But it is important that after you take cover you will be able to move to a safer place if necessary. If it would be impossible or even difficult for you to get out from under a desk or table, don't get under it.

If you are in a wheelchair, stay in it. Turn away from windows. Move the chair into a doorway with your back towards the hinge, or move away from hazards such as falling books or furniture. Set the brake on the chair and, if possible, lean over or hold a pillow, book or even an empty wastebasket over your head and neck for protection.

If you have difficulty moving, but you are not in a wheelchair, assess the situation. Often, you will be safest just staying where you are. If you are in bed or sitting down, stay there while the ground is shaking. If you are on your feet, sit down on the floor or in a chair if it is very close.

The Care Giver:

The important thing to do at this time is to protect yourself. You will be needed most after the earthquakes. So take cover, and if possible, call to the other person with reassurance.

When the quake is over, proceed carefully to check on those for whom you are responsible, and assess the situation of the building as you check them for injuries. If an evacuation is necessary, move carefully, and take essential equipment with you.

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After an Earthquake

What you do after an earthquake depends on where you are and what your personal situation is.

Check yourself carefully for injuries. Use the telephone only if you desperately need help. If you are trapped, use your whistle, bell, or flashlight to attract attention. Pound on beams or windows, walls or pipes, or wave a sheet or jacket out the window.

To Evacuate or Not to Evacuate?

The decision to evacuate is an important one. If evacuation is easy, and if there is any possibility of fire or structural damage, then evacuate to a safe outdoor place. If evacuation would be difficult, then take time to decide. In general, the rule is to evacuate if there is a threat of injury by remaining where you are. If there is no fire, gas leak, or chemical spill and no significant structural damage, then you do not need to evacuate, particularly if the evacuation might be hazardous to you.

If it is necessary to evacuate, people with disabilities should be evacuated last. This is for your own protection, so that you will not be injured in a rush of people. If you are in a wheelchair, on crutches, or use a walker, be sure to ask assistance. It takes two people to assist a person in a wheelchair. Give directions for helping you clearly and calmly. Tell people what items you will need at the evacuation area.

Helpers, Buddies and Rescue Workers:

First, try to locate everyone who might need assistance. Look for people with visual or hearing disabilities. Be respectful and considerate. Try to help without endangering human dignity. Get enough people to do what is necessary without injuring anyone.

When assisting someone with a disability begin by asking the person if they need help and what can you do to assist. Listen to the answer. If you have trouble understanding, ask them to clarify or write down the requests. The person with the disability is in the best position to know the type of assistance required. The person who rushes to help without asking first could cause serious injury.

When assisting someone who uses a cane, crutches or walker,

remember that these will be needed in the evacuation area.

Evacuate the disabled person last, and remember that a hazardous evacuation is the last resort. It requires at least two persons to take a person in a wheelchair up or down a flight of stairs, and it can be dangerous. If there is no compelling threat to safety, a person in a wheel chair would be better off remaining in the building.

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