

Flying solo the safe way

Safety tips for living alone with a disability

by Kathy Wechsler



Therese Nadeau and her black Lab service dog, Sassy.

Reason number three: You can decorate your place with an array of wheelchairs, walkers and standing frames.

Reason number two: Your roommate doesn't leave her dishes for your caregiver to wash.

And, the number one reason people with disabilities want to live alone: You can roll around the house naked and nobody says a word.

Living alone can be the ultimate freedom — but it also can be a dangerous game of Russian Roulette. That's

why it's a good idea to discuss living alone with your [MDA clinic team](#). They can help you decide if it's a safe option for you.

It's important to plan ahead for a fall, medical emergency, fire or other disaster. Prepare for the worst with these safety tips from Therese A. Nadeau of Glastonbury, Conn.

Nadeau, who has [spinal muscular atrophy \(SMA\)](#), is a disability and emergency preparedness consultant who trains first responders and people with disabilities to prepare for emergencies.

'I've fallen, and I can't get up'

- **Always keep at least one telephone nearby**, especially at bedtime. Some emergencies don't require a 911 call, so keep a list of friends' and neighbors' phone numbers, or program them into your phone.
- **Program the numbers for the local police station and fire department into the phone.** In addition to handling other emergencies, they can help you get up after a fall. If you have a service dog, consider getting a special K-9 rescue phone that allows the dog to call 911 in an emergency by pushing a button with its paw (\$249).
- **Have trouble using a regular phone?** It's easy to find phones with large numbers, voice amplification or emergency response buttons (\$30-\$579).

- **A medical alert system** is a pendant worn around the neck or wrist or clipped to a belt. When the pendant button is pressed, a monitoring center is contacted. Through a console in your home, a dispatcher asks if it's an actual emergency and if a friend or family member should be contacted (\$30/month).
- If your speech is difficult to understand, **have a friend record a message for 911**, and keep the recorder near the phone or medic alert system. The message should include your name, address, type of disability and any other relevant information.

Making their jobs easier

- **"ICE" your emergency contacts** in your address book and program important phone numbers into the cell phone by putting ICE (In Case of Emergency) beside the names of people to contact in an emergency, so if first responders find you unconscious, they know who to call. If you have a service dog, include the veterinarian's phone number as an ICE number.
- **Put an ICE sticker on the phone** to notify first responders that you use the feature. They're trained to look for this sticker. To purchase the ICE sticker, visit www.icesticker.com or call (888) ICE-0911.

An ICE sticker on your phone announces you have contacts designated in case of emergency.

