

Senior Safety and Security

This page contains tips on personal safety and security for seniors at home and away from home in various situations. They are simple, common sense suggestions that will help keep you from being an easy target for a criminal.

Inside Your Home

- Keep all doors and windows locked, even if you are just going out “for a minute.”
- Install dead-bolt locks on all doors.
- Don’t give maids or others working in your home access to your home keys or alarm codes.
- Re-key or change all locks when moving into a new home.
- List only your last name and initials on your mailbox or in a phone directory.
- Don’t give your name, phone number, or whereabouts on your answering machine message. Never say you aren’t home. Just ask the caller to leave a message.
- Consider installing a home alarm system that provides monitoring for burglary, fire, and medical emergencies.
- Leave outside lights on after dark or have outside lights controlled by a motion detector.
- Keep drapes or blinds closed at night but leave some lights on.
- Leave drapes or blinds partially open during the day.
- Never dress in front of windows. Always close the drapes or blinds.
- Know your neighbors and keep their phone numbers handy.
- Have a friend or neighbor check on you daily if you are home alone.
- Try never to be alone in the laundry room or any other common area in an apartment building.
- Have government and other regular checks deposited directly in your bank.
- Call the Union City Police Department (770) 306-6849 to arrange for a free home security survey. And ask about starting or joining a Neighborhood Watch program in your area.
- Call the police on **911** if you hear or see something suspicious. Don’t take direct action yourself. An officer will be dispatched to your address even if you cannot speak or hang up.
- Plan an escape route from each room in your residence to use in a fire, earthquake, break-in, or other emergency situation.
- Make sure your street address number is clearly visible from the street and is well lighted at night so the police and other emergency personnel can locate your home easily.
- Make sure your unit Apartment number (in a multifamily housing development) is clearly visible from paths in the development. A directory or map that shows paths and unit locations should be placed at the main entrance of the development.

Answering the Door

- Know who's at your door before opening it. Install a wide-angle peephole in your front door so you can look out without being seen yourself.
- Don't rely on chain locks for security. They're only good for privacy.
- Check photo registration card before dealing with any solicitors, peddlers, interviewers, etc. Call their agency to verify their identity.
- Post a NO SOLICITING sign if you don't want any solicitor to ring your door bell, knock on your door, or make any other sound to attract your attention.
- Ask for photo identification before letting in anyone you don't know. Check out the identification with the company or agency if you are suspicious.
- Never let a stranger enter your home to use the telephone. Offer to make the call yourself in an emergency.

Answering the Phone and Talking to Strangers

- Never give your name or number to a person making a wrong-number phone call or to anyone you don't know.
- Hang up if you receive a threatening or harassing phone call. Call the police if these calls are repeated.
- Don't indicate you are home alone to anyone you don't know.
- Be suspicious of all solicitors, especially if the caller says you have won a prize but asks you to send money first, says you have to act right away, fails to identify the sponsor, uses a variation of an official or nationally-recognized name, e.g., Salvation League instead of Salvation Army, offers to have someone pick up a cash payment from your home, says he or she is a law enforcement officer who will help you for a fee, requires you to attend a sales meeting, directs you to dial a pay-per-call **900** number, delays the delivery of a product or prize, etc.
- Sign up for the National Do Not Call Registry. Call **(888) 382-1222** from the phone or phones you want to register. If you have an e-mail address you can register online at www.donotcall.gov. Telemarketers check the registry every 31 days so it may take that long before your number is removed from their call lists. This should stop calls from all but nonprofit groups, charities, political organizations, survey companies, and companies you have dealt with recently or signed a contract with that includes permission to call you. If telemarketers ignore the fact that your number is on the registry you can report them at the above number or website and sue them for violating your rights. For this you'll need to keep a record of their names and the dates of the calls.
- Never give your credit card, checking account, Social Security number, or any personal information to an unknown caller. Just say "no" and hang up on anyone who asks for personal information. Don't ever assume a friendly voice belongs to a friend.
- Only give your personal information when you have initiated the call and are sure the other party is legitimate.
- Ask a charity to send written information about its finances and programs before making any commitments.
- For additional information contact the Federal Trade Commission Consumer Response Center at **(877) 382-4357** and www.ftc.gov, Federal Communications

Commission Consumer Center at (888) 225-5322 and
http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumers_contacts.html

Returning Home

- Have the person driving you home wait until you are safely inside.
- Leave outside lights on if you'll return after dark.
- Don't overburden yourself with packages that obstruct your view and make it difficult to react in an emergency.
- Have your key in hand so you can open the door immediately.
- Don't go in or call out if you suspect someone has broken into your home, e.g., if a window or screen is broken, a door is ajar, or a strange vehicle is parked in the driveway. Go to a neighbor's home and call the police.
- Keep your headlights on until you are in your garage at night.
- Let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return.
- Walk with a friend or family member.
- Walk with confidence and know where you are going. Be alert. Make eye contact with people you pass.
- Watch your surroundings. Leave any places in which you are uncomfortable. Be especially alert for suspicious persons around banks, ATMs (Automated Teller Machines), stores, your home, etc.
- Cross the street if you see someone suspicious following you.
- Walk into an open business and call the police if you see anyone acting suspicious or following you. Don't go home.
- Don't go out alone at night, venture into unfamiliar or dark places, take shortcuts, talk to or accept rides with strangers, or hitch rides. Don't walk in or near alleys, on deserted streets, near dark doorways or shrubbery.
- Don't approach vehicles even if the occupants say they need directions or assistance.
- Consider your options in the event you are confronted, e.g., scream or blow a whistle to attract attention, flee to a safe area, etc. Decide what you plan to do and practice your responses so you can recall them in a real situation.
- Learn self-defense. Take classes only from licensed instructors. But don't substitute self-defense training for common sense, alertness, and caution.
- Know where telephones are along your route.
- Carry cash and credit cards in a pocket.
- Carry change for emergency telephone and transportation. **911** calls are free.
- Carry identification, medical information, names and phone numbers of people to call in emergencies.
- Carry a card of communications symbols if you have a speech or hearing impairment.
- Carry only necessities.
- Avoid verbal confrontations. They may lead to physical altercations.
- Don't leave notes on your door when you are away from home.
- Don't leave keys in mailboxes or planters, under doormats, or in other obvious hiding spots. Leave an extra key with a neighbor.
- Don't carry a gun, knife, club, chemical spray, or other weapon. Some are illegal to carry and all could be used against you.

On the Street and Other Places

- Let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return.
- Walk with a friend or family member.
- Walk with confidence and know where you are going. Be alert. Make eye contact with people you pass.
- Watch your surroundings. Leave any places in which you are uncomfortable. Be specially alert for suspicious persons around banks, ATMs (Automated Teller Machines), stores, your home, etc.
- Cross the street if you see someone suspicious following you.
- Walk into an open business and call the police if you see anyone acting suspicious or following you. Don't go home.
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On Elevators

- Don't get on an elevator with a stranger. If you do, stand near the control panel and be ready to press the alarm button and other controls if you are attacked.

When Meeting Someone New

- Exchange phone numbers only, not addresses.
- Let a friend or family member know where you are going on a first date.
- Consider a daytime meeting for a first date.
- Be assertive and honest, not passive or coy.

At Social Functions

- Go with and stay close to a friend.
- Use prearranged signals to indicate that you need help or want to leave.
- Don't allow alcohol or drugs impair your judgment.
- Watch your drinks and don't give anyone an opportunity to spike them.
- State your personal social standards and limits. Stick to them and don't let anyone change your mind.
- Avoid people who make you nervous or uncomfortable.
- Provide your own transportation when you go out alone. Take enough money for a cab fare if you are going to be out late.

When Traveling

- Travel with a friend or in a group when possible. There is safety in numbers.
- Plan your touring. Don't discuss your plans with strangers. Beware of strangers who seem overly anxious to help you. Select guides carefully.
- Get good directions to avoid getting lost.
- Find an open business to get directions if you do get lost. Don't appear to be lost by stopping and looking at addresses or street signs.
- Stick to well-lighted main streets and public areas. Ask about areas to avoid.
- Carry a minimum amount of cash. Use credit cards or traveler's checks whenever possible.
- Keep a record of your credit card and traveler's check numbers in a safe place. Also have the phone numbers to call if your cards or checks are lost or stolen.
- Leave your itinerary with a friend or relative and check in with them periodically.
- Store photocopies of your passport, tickets, and other important papers in a hotel safe.
- Keep track of time and don't be late for appointments or meetings.

In a Hotel/Motel Room

- Determine the most direct route to and from your room, to fire escapes, stairs, elevators, and phones.
- Keep your door locked when you are in your room.
- Use the door viewer to identify anyone requesting entry. Open the door only if you are certain it is safe to do so. Call the hotel/motel office if you are in doubt.
- Report any suspicious persons or activities to the hotel/motel office.
- Don't stay in a ground-floor room, especially if you are a woman and traveling alone.

While Driving

- Keep your doors locked and your windows closed.
- Know where you are going. Stop and get directions before you get lost.
- Avoid driving alone, especially at night and in dangerous areas.
- Never pick up hitchhikers.

- Drive to the nearest open business and call the police if anyone is following you. Don't go home.
- Keep your vehicle in gear when stopped for traffic signals or signs. Try to leave room to drive away if threatened. Be alert for anyone approaching your vehicle.
- Keep purses and other valuables out of view when driving alone. Put them in the trunk or on the floor.
- Honk your horn or flash your emergency lights to attract attention if you are threatened while in your vehicle.
- Stay in your vehicle if you stop to aid others. Find out what the problem is and offer to call or drive to the nearest phone and report the situation.
- Keep your vehicle in good mechanical condition so it won't break down and leave you stranded on the road. Also keep enough gas in the tank so you won't run out.
- If your vehicle breaks down or runs out of gas, pull over to the right as far as possible, raise the hood, and call or wait for help. Remain in your vehicle with the doors and windows locked until you can identify any person who comes to help.
- Be wary of minor rear-end collisions, especially at night on dark freeway off ramps. Remain in your vehicle with the doors and windows locked if you are uneasy or suspicious. Drive to the nearest open business to check the damage and exchange insurance information.
- Control your gestures and other reactions to keep "road-rage" incidents from escalating to violence.

In Parking Lots and Garages

- Park in open, well-lighted, and populated areas near your destination.
- Avoid parking near trucks, vans, dumpsters, and other objects that obstruct visibility and provide hiding places. Avoid parking or walking near strangers loitering or sitting in vehicles. Check that no one is hiding around your vehicle before you get out.
- Report any lights that are out to the facility operator.
- Lock your vehicle and take your keys with you.
- Never leave any valuables in plain sight.
- Conceal maps or travel brochures that might indicate you are a tourist.
- Remember where you parked so you can return directly to your vehicle. Be alert and walk purposefully.
- Have your key in hand so you can open the door immediately when you return to your vehicle.
- Check that no one is hiding in or around your vehicle before you get in.
- Ask a co-worker or security guard to escort you to your vehicle if your work late.
- Don't leave your home keys on a chain with your vehicle keys when you use valet parking. Also, don't leave your garage door opener where it is easily accessible.
- Keep your vehicle registration, proof of insurance, and any other papers with your home address on them where a criminal is not likely to find them.
- Don't resist or argue with a carjacker. Your life is much more valuable than your vehicle. Be especially alert when parking at fast food places, gas stations, ATMs, and shopping areas along suburban highways.

While Riding a Bus or Trolley

- Wait in a central area near other passengers.
- Have your fare or pass ready when boarding.
- Sit near the operator.
- Keep your handbag and packages on your lap instead of on the floor or seat next to you.
- Change seats and tell the operator if anyone bothers you.
- Avoid using dark or isolated stops at night.
- Stay alert for any possible dangers when exiting.

When Carrying a Purse or Wallet

- Avoid carrying a purse when possible. Wear a money pouch instead.
- Carry a purse with a shoulder strap if you must. Keep the strap over your shoulder, the flap next to your body, and your hand on the strap. When wearing a coat, keep the strap and purse under the coat.
- Keep a tight grip on your purse. Don't let it hang loose or leave it on a counter in a store.
- Carry your wallet, keys, and other valuables in an inside or front pants pocket, a fanny pack, or other safe place. Don't carry a wallet in a back pocket.
- Never put your purse or wallet on a counter while shopping.
- Carry checks or credit cards instead of cash. Don't display any cash you do carry.
- Leave credit cards you don't expect to use at home.
- Keep a record at home of check and credit card numbers, and phone numbers to call in case of theft or loss. Carry this information separately or store it in a hotel/motel safe if you are on a trip or otherwise unable to get home promptly to report a loss.
- Shop with a friend when possible.
- Don't fight for your purse if someone tries to take it by force.

When Using an ATM

- Select an ATM with clear lines of sight in all directions, i.e., at locations with no building corners, shrubs, signs, etc. that provide possible hiding places for an attacker.
- Be aware of your surroundings before and during your transaction, especially between dusk and dawn. Return later or use an ATM in a supermarket or convenience store if you notice anything suspicious, e.g., a person loitering nearby.
- Avoid using poorly lighted or isolated ATMs. Complete your transaction as fast as possible and leave the facility.
- Don't go alone.
- Park in a well-lighted area as close to the ATM as possible.
- Keep your doors locked and passenger and rear windows rolled up when using a drive-through ATM.
- Shield the keypad when using your PIN so it can't be seen.

- Memorize your PIN and keep it secret. Don't write it down or keep it in your wallet or purse.
- Put your cash, receipt, and ATM card away promptly. Count your cash later in private. Do not leave your receipt at the ATM site.
- Avoid being too regular. Don't use the same ATM at the same time of day and day of the week.
- Make sure you are not being followed when you leave an ATM location. Drive immediately to a police or fire station, or any well-lighted and crowded location or open business and get help if you are being followed. Flash your lights and sound your horn to attract attention.
- Give up your money or valuables if you are confronted by an armed robber. Any delay can make a robber more nervous and increases the likelihood of violence.

Protecting Your Assets

Criminals often view seniors as targets of opportunity not only for street robberies and purse snatches but for various frauds and confidence schemes. The following tips will help you protect your assets. Additional tips on preventing telemarketing and email fraud and identity theft are provided on the page entitled Fraud and Identity Theft.

- Don't discuss your assets or finances with strangers.
- Execute a springing power of attorney in which you designate an agent to manage your assets if you lose the mental capacity to do so. The springing power of attorney is preferred over an immediate power of attorney in that it ensures that you remain in control of your assets until two doctors declare that you lack the mental capacity to manage them. Things get very complicated if you become incapacitated without either type of power of attorney because a conservatorship may then be required.
- Don't keep large sums of money at home. Keep stocks, bonds, expensive jewelry, coin collections, etc. in a bank safe deposit box.
- Read contracts carefully and understand the terms before signing. Get help from someone you trust if you are not comfortable with the terms.
- Don't pay for work in your home in advance.
- Be careful in writing checks. Print out the full name of the payee. Never use abbreviations like ALP. Print the amount of the check. Longhand writing is easier to alter. Fill in any remaining space on the amount line with double lines. Sign with a clear, readable signature. An illegible one is easy to forge. And never sign a blank check.
- Consider having new checks mailed directly to your bank for collection to avoid possible theft from your mailbox.
- Never get involved with and provide or show money to strangers. Some common confidence schemes involve phony bank examiners who ask you to help trap a crooked teller, strangers who want to share found money, strangers who want to donate money to a charity of your choice, and strangers who want you to help prove that banks can be trusted. Note that all these schemes involve strangers and stories that sound too good to be true.

- Never give out credit card, bank account, or other personal information unless you have initiated the contact or know and trust the person you are dealing with. Beware of mail, telephone, and email promotions designed to obtain personal information. In an email scam know as “phishing” identity thieves fish for personal information by sending realistic-looking email that asks recipients to go to a bogus website and provide personal information such as credit card and Personal Identification Numbers (PINs). Don’t click on website addresses in emails you get even if they look real. Legitimate banks and financial institutions don’t send emails asking you to verify your account information. They already have it.
- Have your Social Security checks deposited directly into you bank account. If you don’t have a bank account you should get a free prepaid MasterCard debit card instead of a paper check. With it you can get cash from ATMs, pay bills, and make purchases anywhere these cards are used. There are no sign-up fees and bank accounts or credit checks are not required. With the card you will not have to use expensive check-cashing facilities, carry around large amounts of cash, or risk lost or stolen checks. You can enroll online at www.usdirectexpress.com or by phone at (877) 212-9991.

If You Are a Crime Victim

For reporting purposes, crimes and suspicious activities are considered as either emergencies or non-emergencies. Situations in which you, a member of your family, or a person in your care are attacked or threatened are considered as emergencies and should be reported by calling **911**. Be sure to tell the dispatcher about your current medical condition and the need for immediate medical assistance. Crimes in which: (1) there is no serious personal injury, property damage, or property loss; (2) there is no possibility that the suspect is still at the scene or is likely to return to the scene; and (3) an immediate response is not needed are considered as non emergencies. These situations and suspicious activities should be reported to the Union City Police Department by calling (770)964-1333 or (770) 306-6849.

Elder and Dependent Adult Abuse

If the abuse is in progress, you should call **911**. The police will investigate, take steps to protect the victim, prosecute the perpetrator, and inform the appropriate office.

The following are some signs of various types of elder and dependent adult abuse:

- *Neglect*. Inadequate clothing, missed medical appointments, dirty and unkempt appearance, malnutrition, dehydration, bedsores, home that smells of urine or feces, utilities turned off, no food in home, or lack of necessary medications, eyeglasses, hearing aid, etc.
- *Psychological abuse*. Unreasonable or excessive fears, withdrawal, loss of appetite, agitation, isolation from family and friends, unexplained bouts of crying, or confusion.
- *Physical abuse*. Bites, burns, and unexplained broken bones, welts, or bruises.

- *Financial abuse.* Transfers of large amounts of money, inability to pay bills or buy basic necessities, lack of knowledge or confusion about own finances, vanishing personal property, frequent ATM withdrawals, increased credit card activity, refinanced home mortgage, newly authorized account signers, and changes in bank account activity, account beneficiaries, property titles, trusts, will, etc.
- *Sexual abuse.* Unexplained venereal diseases or genital infections, bruising or bleeding in the genital area, unexplained pain or itching in the genital area, or torn, stained, or bloody underwear.

Many kinds of elder abuse can be prevented by the careful selection of home care agencies and caregivers. The following are some questions to ask about agencies:

- What is its licensing status? Is it certified by Medicare and Medicaid? How long has it been in existence?
- Does it carry liability insurance? Are the caregivers bonded?
- What are its hiring standards? Does it do criminal and financial background checks? Does it provide training? How are the caregivers supervised?

The following tips involve home caregivers:

- Hire through a reputable agency. Fire any caregiver who offers to work independently for less.
- Check references of past employment.
- Obtain a recent photograph of the caregiver and copies of his or hers driver's license and Social Security card.
- Do not let caregivers deal with financial matters. Have a trusted relative or friend, licensed professional fiduciary, or bank handle all accounts, pay bills, etc. Lock up or remove from the home all financial records, checkbooks, credit cards, personal ID information, etc. Do not allow caregivers to have access to the elder's computer.
- Do not lend money to the caregiver.
- Supply a limited amount of cash for necessities and require receipts and an itemized accounting of all expenditures. Do not allow the caregiver to use the elder's credit card.
- At the federal level the National Center on Elder Abuse serves as a resource center dedicated to the prevention of elder abuse. On its website at www.ncea.aoa.gov you will find information on:
 - How to find help if you are worried about a senior in your community
 - Definitions, signs, and risks of elder abuse
 - Resources for caregivers

Lost Person with Alzheimer's Disease

After calling **911** to report a lost or found person, call the Alzheimer's Association's *Safe Return Program* 24-hour Hotline at **1-800-625-3780**. Your call will activate a community response team that will:

- notify other law enforcement agencies, hospitals, transportation modes, the media, and other organizations, as appropriate
- provide support to the family
- provide new information to law enforcement agencies as available; and (4) notify all agencies when the person is found.

http://www.alz.org/we_can_help_medicalert_safereturn.asp