

Reducing Your Risks of Crime Victimization in the Community

Senior Wellness Series



Don't be a crime victim. AND you don't have to be a "prisoner in your own home" due to fear of crime. Fear of crime itself can victimize older adults if it paralyzes them into staying home, in effect isolating themselves and enjoying their lives less.

Fact: Crime rates against older adults are lower than for the rest of the population.

The media focus on crime reporting, gives people the mistaken impression that seniors are major targets of violent crime. However Bureau of Justice statistics show that violent crime, personal theft, and household victimization rates for people age 65 and older are the lowest of any age group. Older persons are not victimized by crime to a greater extent than the rest of

the population, except in crimes such as purse snatching and pocket picking.

Although less likely to be attacked, older adults are more likely to be injured if they are crime victims with a greater potential for serious injury and need for medical care.

However, you still want to be cautious. Low victimization rates mean nothing when you are the one who has been robbed or hurt. There are some simple techniques you can use to take control and alter your environment to lower your personal chances of being a crime victim when you away from home.

Reading the following information and using these easy techniques will help reduce the risk that an older adult will become a crime victim.



Walking/Shopping

- Stay alert when you are on the street, in your own neighborhood, and even at your own door.
- Avoid walking at night, especially alone. If you must walk at night, stay in well-lit, open areas and walk close to street lights.
- Day or night, stay away from dark alleys, dark parking lots, and dark corners.
- Avoid areas where an assailant might hide, such as dark passageways, shrubbery, and spaces between parked cars.
- Day or night, walk with a friend if possible. Both men and women are safer in the company of someone else.
- If anyone bothers you while you are out walking, ignore them. Don't engage in conversation or try to be polite. If they persist, tell them in a loud voice, showing anger, to leave you alone. A simple defense against this sort of aggravation would be a loud whistle or scream. Based on this, you may want to carry a whistle with you.
- If you are followed, run to the nearest place you can find people. Don't be afraid to knock on somebody's door.
- Don't be a flashy dresser going out with expensive jewelry or other items of value.



Don't carry a purse!

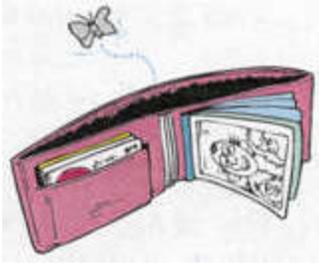
This one action can cut your chances of being robbed by more than 50%. Not having a purse can remove the strongest attraction for a crime of opportunity thief. Purses are easily snatched when you are carrying them. Also, it's easy to place a purse in a grocery cart, at a casino or a beauty salon, where it can easily be stolen.

- If you insist on carrying a purse, put money, credit cards, and/or your wallet in an inside pocket of your clothing or someplace other than in your purse.
- Don't carry a lot of cash or more credit cards than you need.
- For people who insist on carrying purses: Carry a sound alarm, available at Walmart (looks like pager, take the peg out and it makes a horrendous noise) and hook the pager (alarm) part to purse, and the strap on the peg to your belt. If purse gets snatched, the alarm will sound and the thief will throw the purse to get away from the noise.

Keys

- Carry keys in a pocket, not a purse. If your purse is stolen, you will still have your keys.
- Don't put your name or address on your keys, because if they are stolen or lost, the thief will know where you live.





Wallets

Placement of a rubber band around a wallet can deter a pick-pocket because the rubber band creates resistance. You will feel the wallet being lifted.

Bank

- Have Social Security, monthly pension checks and any other regular payments directly deposited to your bank account. This not only removes your exposure to potential theft but also saves you an errand.
- If you go to the bank often, don't go at the same time each day. Add some variation to your schedule.
- If anyone steps behind you at an ATM, step away-say: "You go first, I forgot my card."
- If you are approached by a robber, hand over any cash you have. Hand over your purse if you are carrying one. Don't resist the robbery because you risk injury to yourself.



Driving

- Drive with the car windows up and all the doors locked.
- Keep car in good operating condition.
- Never allow your gas tank to get below half full.
- Never pick up hitchhikers.
- If you have trouble with your car, stay inside with windows up and doors locked.
- Turn on emergency flashers. Or tie a white handkerchief to antenna or door handle.
- A cell phone with a low monthly rate but higher per minute charges can be an inexpensive insurance policy. Leave it in the car and have an adapter so that it runs off the cigarette lighter and you don't need to take it out of the car to charge the batteries and possibly forget to return it.
- If you have no cell phone, you should have 2 quarters sealed in envelope and kept in your glove compartment.
- If you have a vehicle problem, stay in the vehicle. If someone comes by to help, write down on the envelope a number for him or her to call for you. Open the window a crack and slide the envelope through to them, asking them to make the call.
- Avoid driving alone at night if possible. It is safer to drive at night with someone you know.
- For safety reasons, people who live alone should go to the store with a friend and arrange to do their grocery shopping together. Riding to the store with someone else helps both of you.

Valet parking

- Only give the valet your car key, not all your keys.
- If you keep your car registration (which has your address) in your car, lock it in your glove box.
- Lock your garage door opener and anything else you don't want stolen in your glove box.
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