

Activity Guide

The theme for Older Americans Month 2014 is “Safe Today. Healthy Tomorrow.” With this theme, we recognize older adults for their contributions and sacrifices by helping them stay safe and active as they age. The theme focuses on injury prevention and safety to encourage older adults to protect themselves and remain active and independent for as long as possible.



Unintentional injuries to this population result in at least 6 million medically treated injuries and more than 30,000 deaths every year. With an emphasis on safety during Older Americans Month, we encourage older adults to learn about the variety of ways they can avoid the leading causes of injury.

By conducting activities and providing safety information on a variety of topics to older adults in your community, you can help them take control of their safety and live longer, healthier lives.



About This Guide

Some of the leading causes of injuries to older adults are falls, fires, motor vehicle incidents, consumer product-related incidents, improper use of medicines, elder abuse, and suffocations. This guide provides suggested activities and resources for avoiding these risks. The information should be presented in a way that helps seniors feel empowered, not threatened.

To make Older Americans Month a truly national event, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) and the Administration on Aging (AoA), an agency of ACL, are encouraging organizations around the country to host a Safety Day. This event will feature activities designed to bring older adults together with others in your neighborhood to socialize, engage, and learn how to stay safe. This guide includes suggestions; feel free to tailor these suggestions or come up with your own ideas to better suit your community! Whether you choose to host one activity or several, this toolkit can help you coordinate your Safety Day.

The following information on the different types of risks underscores the importance of helping older adults take control of their safety.

Falls

Falls are the leading cause of fatal and non-fatal injuries among adults 65 and older. (Tromp 2001) Annually, older adult falls are responsible for more than 21,700 deaths, 2.4 million emergency department visits, and more than \$30 billion in direct medical costs. (CDC 2014 WISQARS, Stevens 2006) This is an increasingly important public health issue as the rates for both fall deaths and emergency visits for falls are rising. (WISQARS 2014) Because the U.S. population is aging, falls will continue to increase unless preventive action is taken. Below is a list of key risk factors and what can be done about them.

- **Fallen in the past year.** Older adults who have fallen once are more likely to fall again. Screening older adults by using the [Stay Independent brochure](#) can identify a person's risk level of falling and whether further assessment is needed by a health care professional. Community programs such as A Matter of Balance or Stepping On can empower older adults to assess their risks and to take appropriate actions.
- **Lack of exercise.** Lack of exercise can lead to weak legs and this increases the chances of falling. Exercise programs such as Tai Chi can increase strength and improve balance, making falls much less likely. Other programs found in the community including EnhanceFitness, Fit and Strong!, and others such as yoga, water aerobics, and dancing can be promoted to increase physical activity among older adults.
- **Combination of medications.** Some medicines—or combinations of medicines—can have side effects such as dizziness or drowsiness. This can make falling more likely. Having a doctor or pharmacist review all medications can help reduce the chance of risky side effects and drug interactions.
- **Poor vision.** Poor vision can make it harder to get around safely. Older adults should have their eyes checked every year and wear glasses or contact lenses with the right prescription strength to ensure they are seeing clearly. [Learn more about protecting your vision.](#)
- **Hazards at home.** About half of all falls happen at home. A home safety check can help identify potential fall hazards that need to be removed or changed, such as tripping hazards, clutter, and poor lighting. Adding grab bars in the bathroom is important at any age to reduce tub and toilet falls. [View a sample home safety checklist.](#)

Fire Safety

U.S. Fire Administration data state that Americans over age 65 are one of the groups at greatest risk of dying in a fire. On average, more than 1,000 Americans age 65 and over die in fires each year. People over the age of 85 die in fires at a rate five times higher than the rest of the population. Take steps to educate your community members about fire safety. You could save a life.

Motor Vehicle Safety

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported in 2011 that 17 percent of all traffic fatalities in the United States were among people age 65 and older. Loss of muscle tone and flexibility, changes in vision or hearing, and slowed reaction time may put some older drivers at greater risk. Elders can protect themselves by taking refresher driving courses, remaining as fit and flexible as possible, and taking care of their vision and hearing.

Consumer Product Safety

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, adults 65 and older have higher rates of medically treated consumer product-related injuries and consumer product-related deaths than other adults. Products that may be involved in an injury scenario are numerous. Examples include yard and garden equipment, ladders or step stools, and personal use items like clothing. Many accidents and injuries can be prevented by taking precautions around the home. Tips and checklists can provide simple steps that older adults can take to make their homes safer.

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Bed Rail Safety

Products of special concern are adult bed rails which are thought of as a safety device. However, when used improperly, they can cause a person to become entangled or strangled. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have received many death and injury reports related to both adult portable bed rail products and hospital bed rails. It is important for individuals to follow the recommendations from FDA and CPSC on how to effectively use these devices.

Improper Use of Medicines

From 2004 to 2008, the Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality reports there was a 121 percent increase in emergency visits involving prescription medication misuse by older Americans. The combination of increased medication use paired with normal body changes caused by aging can increase the chance of unwanted, and even harmful, drug effects or interactions. It is important for older adults and their caregivers to be aware of the dangers of using medications improperly.

Suffocation/Choking

According to the National Safety Council, choking is the third leading cause of home injury death for adults over the age of 76. Choking deaths peak at age 85 and are the second leading cause of unintentional injury death in adults 89 and older. Learning about the causes of choking and how improper use of consumer products can lead to suffocation are important safety steps.



Elder Abuse/ Mistreatment

Elder abuse is recognized by experts as a public health crisis for which there are no socio-economic borders. Every year an estimated 2.1 million older Americans are victims of elder abuse, neglect, or exploitation. Elder abuse comes in many forms; it can be physical, emotional or financial. Help seniors in your community learn how they can protect themselves.

Activities

- Host a Safety Day! Invite local health and safety professionals to participate, and have a half-day or day-long fair with experts on a variety of topics. Provide lunch or snacks and make it a festive occasion. If coordinating a fair is too demanding, select one or more of the activities below and focus on one at a time.
- Consider partnering with other organizations to enhance your effectiveness:
 - Local public health office to learn about injury prevention activities
 - State coalition on fall prevention (<http://www.ncoa.org/FPAD>)
 - Local hospital or medical center
 - Local emergency medical response teams and fire departments
 - Entry level health care programs: students to provide fall risk screenings. Physical therapy, occupational therapy, pharmacy, nursing, and physician assistant students make great partners.
- Host a home and/or fire safety workshop and provide information on how seniors can take steps to protect themselves at home. Share safety tips like the ones in this checklist from the CDC to frame the presentation. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/toolkit/checklistforsafety.htm>
- Contact your local fire department to ask them to do a fire safety presentation or conduct your own fire safety workshop and distribute a home safety checklist so that seniors, families, or caregivers can evaluate their home's safety.
- Contact your local auto club (e.g., AAA) or Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to schedule a workshop or demonstration on safe driving for older adults. Provide information on available transportation alternatives, such as public transit or local shuttles, for those who are no longer driving.
- Hold a workshop that discusses the various types of elder abuse. Provide statistics to demonstrate how widespread the problem is. Distribute local contact information that people can use if they or a loved one should need help.
- Talk to the older adults you work with and find out what safety topics interest them. A speaker series might include local professors, authors, or other experts giving presentations on the topics of greatest interest.

Planning Your Event

Select a site that is easy for participants to get to and is large enough to accommodate everyone. Talk to the venue administrator about any equipment you may need, such as chairs, tables, projectors, and audiovisual equipment.

Make a Checklist

Think carefully about the goods, people, and materials you might need, and allow time to order supplies. Here is a checklist you may want to use:

- Refreshments (consider asking a local business to donate snacks)
- Digital projector
- Public address (PA) system
- Equipment (for example, fire extinguishers for demonstrations)
- Adequate seating
- Pens and notepads
- Featured presenters and speakers
- Handouts and other materials
- Decorations
- Transportation for event participants
- A rain plan (if you intend to hold your event outdoors)
- Event insurance in case of an injury at the event

Here are a few things to keep in mind:

Are the venues you prefer available, and do you need to reserve them for your use?

If it is an outdoor event, can you rely on good weather?

Does your date conflict with a holiday or other major events? If so, you might consider rescheduling.



Promote Your Safety Day

Once you've scheduled your event, it is time to start promoting it. Use the logos, posters, and other promotional items in the theme section of the [ACL website](#) to start raising awareness of your Safety Day and recruiting participants. Send a media advisory or news release to community papers, blogs, and radio stations. Place posters in local businesses and distribute information to senior centers and other partner organizations. Focus your publicity efforts where your audience spends a lot of time and on the publications, websites, etc., where they get their information.

Tell Us About It!

Older Americans Month is all about promoting health and safety and building community. We encourage you to share information about your event with other communities that are celebrating Older Americans Month. Post your events on the AoA Facebook and Twitter pages. Use the hashtag #OAM2014 so all Older Americans Month followers can see your tweets.

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Resources

The following resources provide additional information, training materials, tips, checklists, and general information to help you inform your community about how to stay safe.

Fall Prevention

- <http://www.ncoa.org/improve-health/falls-prevention/>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/toolkit/checklistforsafety.htm>
- http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/pdf/steady/stay_independent.pdf
- <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/WhatYouCanDoToPreventFalls.html>
- <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/falls/aboutfalls/01.html>
- <http://longtermcare.gov/the-basics/protecting-your-older-loved-one-from-a-fall/>
- <http://www.phconnect.org/group/falls>

Fire Safety

- <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/citizens/older/>
- <http://www.cpsc.gov//PageFiles/122044/702.pdf>

Motor Vehicle Safety

- <http://www.nhtsa.gov/Driving+Safety/Older+Drivers>
- http://www.seniortransportation.net/Portals/0/Cache/Pages/Resources/Aging_Network_Panels.pdf
- http://www.seniortransportation.net/Portals/0/Cache/Pages/Resources/Mature_Panels.pdf
- <http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/older-drivers>

Consumer Product Safety

- <http://www.cpsc.gov//PageFiles/122038/701.pdf>
- <http://www.cpsc.gov//PageFiles/122032/705.pdf>
- <http://www.fda.gov/MedicalDevices/ProductsandMedicalProcedures/HomeHealthandConsumer/ConsumerProducts/BedRailSafety/default.htm>
- <http://www.cpsc.gov/en/Safety-Education/Neighborhood-Safety-Network/Posters/Adult-Bed-Rails/>

Medication Use

- <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/drugabuse/improperuse/01.html>
- <http://www.fda.gov/drugs/resourcesforyou/consumers/tipsforseniors/default.htm>
- http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/AoA_Programs/HPW/Behavioral/docs2/Issue%20Brief%205%20Prescription%20Med%20Misuse%20Abuse.pdf

Elder Abuse/Mistreatment

- <http://ncea.aoa.gov/>
- <http://www.consumerfinance.gov/older-americans/>

Suffocation/Choking

- http://www.nsc.org/safety_home/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Pages/Choking.aspx#older
- http://aging.ohio.gov/resources/publications/HWtoolkit_choking.pdf