



Scammers tend to target elderly people with all kinds of schemes, taking advantage of their isolation, ease of trust, higher savings, and lack of tech savvy, among other things.

Unfortunately, these scams often work. Advanced technology can be hard for many seniors to keep up with, and they may be viewed as naive or gullible. To top it all off, con artists target elders knowing that they may be lonely, longing for purpose in life, and are more trusting of and willing to help younger people.

Many schemes against seniors are performed over e-mail, the phone and even through door-to-door advertising. They may take the form of alleged credit card offers, charity donation requests, home improvement offers, investment opportunities, banking and wire transfers, insurance offers, health products, and sweepstakes and contests, to name a few.



CREDIT CARDS



CHARITIES



HOME IMPROVEMENTS



INVESTMENTS



BANKING & WIRE TRANSFERS



INSURANCE



HEALTH PRODUCTS



CONTESTS

A lot of times, these scams go unreported or are hard to prosecute. Of course, they can be catastrophic to senior victims, especially those in vulnerable situations. For example, wealthy seniors are not the only ones at risk of financial abuse. Low-income elderly individuals are also very much subject to being targeted, and it's not always strangers who commit these crimes. You may be surprised to learn that **more than 90 percent of all reported elder abuse** is actually perpetrated by a senior's very own family members.

This guide covers the various fraud tactics that scammers commonly use, followed by more detail on each type of fraud. Last but not least, if you suspect that you or someone you know may be a victim of a scam, briefly review the resources you can turn to.

Expert Insight on Elderly Scams

Before delving into the common scams that target the elderly, let's take a look at some insight that experts have to share about the topic:



Jessica Tharp

PRESIDENT AND CEO OF THE BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU OF CENTRAL ILLINOIS

“ When an official-looking message pops up on your computer, stating it has a virus and asking for your credit-card number to provide a repair, it's following a time-honored con-artist tradition. The internet is like scams on steroids, as technology evolves, the way they get a hold of you becomes new. The end result is the same. They're after your information. They're after your money. Whatever that pitch is to get you to provide that information might change a little bit. ”



Doug Schuster

MOHAVE COUNTY SHERIFF



“ We have seen an increase of phone scams as con artists pretend to be someone they're not, including law enforcement officers. Don't be a victim, trust your instincts. If a call seems suspicious it probably is. Government agencies never require payments over the phone. If you receive such a call, please contact your local law enforcement agency immediately. Don't be a victim and remember when in doubt, don't give information out. ”



Paul Gentile

PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE COOPERATIVE CREDIT UNION ASSOCIATION

“ While regulators are working hard to address the scourge of financial fraud, education is key, particularly with hundreds of millions of Americans' personal information readily available to criminals. All financial consumers need to take steps to protect themselves financially and digitally, including by being aware of the latest trends in frauds and scams. ”

Common Fraud Tactics Used on Seniors

Con artists employ a wide variety of tactics to get older people to fall for their schemes. Below are some to be cautious of:

Being friendly, approachable, and sympathetic so that the victim feels like the solicitor is on his or her side

Instilling fear or giving a sense of urgency so people don't have much time to think or act rationally

Appearing to be helpful to gain someone's trust and make that person feel inclined to return a favor later on

Using emotional arousal to skew proper judgment; **not long ago, researchers at Stanford found** that when elderly individuals are in a state of high emotional arousal, they become more interested in buying things that are falsely advertised

Pretending to be associated with a credible company, government agency, or charity to fake legitimacy

Being ambiguous about the subject or changing it throughout a conversation to distract the victim

Popular Scams Targeting the Elderly

The **National Council on Aging (NCOA)** lists the following scams that are most commonly targeted on seniors. Review each type below so that you can identify a potential scam. A few other kinds of scams are covered as well.



Health Insurance Scams

Every citizen who is 65 years or older qualifies for Medicare benefits, making the elderly an easy target for medical-related scams. Because scammers don't have to do extensive research on seniors' insurance providers, they can carry out fraudulent schemes pretty easily via the phone or even at the door. These solicitors typically claim to be a Medicare representative, for example, and do the following:

Tell a senior that he or she needs a new Medicare card, and to be issued one, would need to provide Social Security number

Ask an elderly person to contribute a fee to help navigate the new Obamacare landscape

Tell an older adult that he or she needs new supplemental policies

Gather personal information provided to bill Medicare and take the money for themselves



Telemarketing Swindles

Telemarketing scams are **one of the most common scams** to happen to the elderly, due to no face-to-face interaction and convincing charades of being an authority figure.

Scammers can hook seniors by pretending to offer:

Free trials

Extended warranties

Can't-miss investment opportunities

The chance to travel for cheap or free

Incredible prizes

Advance loans

Scammers may also get seniors' money by representing themselves as:

IRS agents

Investors

Bank officials

Family members

One of the worst parts of a telemarketing scam is that if it is successful on someone, the victim's name will be likely passed on to other con artists as an easy target to prey on.

The best way to prevent falling victim to any telemarketing scheme is to know that any legitimate financial institution or large

corporation along with agencies such as the IRS will not call and ask for personal information over the phone.

Should you receive such calls, it's best to hang up immediately and find the direct number to the company claiming to require your information. Then, call to see if it is actually trying to reach you. Below are a few of the most common scams over the phone.



The Pigeon Drop

Basically a pigeon drop can be distilled to when a **"suspect offers a larger sum of money to the victim in exchange for a smaller sum of money"**. There is usually a second or third person in on the scam to act as a lawyer or 'innocent bystander' to make the scam more convincing. These are often done in person at tourist spots, but they also occur over the phone often.

If someone contacts you saying that he or she recently inherited money from an uncle but needs a smaller amount of money from you to transfer the inheritance, this could be an example of a pigeon drop. You would be promised something like half of the inheritance.





The Fake Accident Scenario

Scammers will call saying that someone related to or known by the victim has been injured and is currently in the hospital requiring money to be sent immediately. The scammer often pressures the victim to send the money before verifying the validity of the injury and relation to the person who is injured. Another con artist is often involved to act as the police officer, doctor, or lawyer at the scene of the "accident."



Robocalls

A scam that seems to have arisen in 2017 uses pre-recorded robocalls to get the victim to say, "Yes." Questions such as, "Are you there?" tend to prompt this answer, and scammers who have someone's "yes" reply recorded may be able to use that voice signature to put charges on credit cards and the like.



Apps to Help Protect Against Telemarketing Scams

Several free smartphone apps use crowdsourcing to identify phone numbers involved in scams or frauds and that can be automatically blocked. Here are a few of the top caller ID and scam blocking apps for both Android and iOS.



Hiya - Hiya is one of the most widely used apps for caller ID and blocking spam calls. You can set it to automatically block calls from numbers that have been reported as a scam or spam repeatedly, and block new numbers that scammers use. You can also report the number so others using the app know to avoid it.

Android | iOS



Truecaller - This is another reliable and popular app to protect yourself against unwanted calls and to know immediately if a new number is a scam as reported by others who received the same call.

Android | iOS



Whoscall - Whoscall has over 1 billion numbers in its database, and the figure constantly increases as users of the app report more and more unknown numbers as spam and scams. Hopefully, this app helps you know when you're receiving a call from a legit business or a scammer.

Android | iOS

To safeguard against robocall scams and telemarketing scams, join the Do Not Call Registry. This way, if you get questionable calls, chances are even higher that they are scams. In addition, when you get a question such as, "Do you hear me?" just hang up. Some callers may encourage you to press "1" to be removed from a call list or to speak with a real person. Don't do this. It just shows the scammers that you are responsive. Your aim is to avoid engaging at all.



Charity Scams

These scams are unfortunate as they prey on the goodwill of others. Scammers either call or approach an elderly individual in person, saying they are looking for donations to a worthy cause. In reality, the perpetrators have nothing to do with the charity or cause and are looking to take the victim's money for their own gain.

Sometimes the goal is to steal the victim's identity as well. Charity scams tend to happen most after natural disasters on the international level like a **major hurricane** or on a local level like helping to fund **local firefighters**.



Internet Fraud

The internet has been rife with **scams targeting the elderly** since its inception. Examples include: fake-virus popups to trick the victims into paying money, real viruses that may hold victims hostage until they make a payment, phishing scams and attempts to steal identities through fake websites and emails.



Phishing Scams via Email - Phishing is the main internet method scammers use to get personal information from unsuspecting people through email. The scammer creates an email address and template that looks like an official email from a bank, business, or other website that a person visits frequently. The email looks legitimate and claims that your password, banking number, and/or other personal identifying information is needed to fix an issue.

No bank or other business will ever ask for any personal information through an email. If you are concerned about your account, you can go to the website directly (don't click on any links in a suspected phishing email), and check your account information there, or call your bank directly.



Tech or Computer Support Scams

Tech or computer support scams tend to be the most successful. In some versions, senior citizens get a call from someone who promises to do tech support on their computers/devices or to clear their computers of viruses, malware and the like. To sweeten the pot, scammers may offer this so-called service at a senior-citizen discount. Later, the scammers do rudimentary work such as installing free security programs, and it is possible that seniors never realize they have been scammed. In other versions, scammers use internet ads to entice senior citizens to contact them for help.

The primary aim of many scammers doing tech or computer support schemes is to get access to bank account passwords and other sensitive financial information. Because they pose as tech support personnel, they may get permission to link their computer with the victim's. Sometimes, the scam turns mean immediately when a scammer locks the victim out of his or her

computer until a fee is paid. Disengaging from the scammer and restarting your computer may solve the issue sometimes.



Lottery and Fake Prize Scams

Thousands of seniors are tricked into believing that they won a large sum of money but are told that they have to wire money in “taxes and fees” or to free the grand prize up from customs officials. After going through with this and receiving a check that doesn’t clear, the victim realizes that he or she has been scammed.

Unfortunately, once people fall for this scam, they are at higher risk for getting more lottery and fake-prize scam calls, emails and offers. Astonishingly, a scammer may even call the victims and claim to be a police officer or detective investigating possible lottery and fake-prize scamming. In order to investigate, the detective needs to know the victim’s financial information. On it goes. According to the **U.S. Attorney General** and the Solicitor General of Canada, this mass-marketing fraud takes about \$1 billion a year!



Counterfeit Prescription Medications

Since many older people are on a fixed income or living off retirement funds, it's only natural that they are **often on the lookout** for cheaper drug alternatives to save money.

Unfortunately, scammers are fully aware of this, and they prey on seniors' vulnerability of wanting to save. Criminals use the internet to operate these scams, offering "better prices" on prescription medications which are counterfeit and often detrimental to one's health. Older adults should consult with their loved ones before buying any type of medication online to be extra safe.



Fake Anti-Aging Products

Speaking of counterfeits, fake anti-aging products are another big focus of scammers who target seniors. The NCOA states that seniors often **feel pressured to look younger** in order to keep up in social circles or to fill a void in their lives. This results in them seeking out new treatments, medications, and products that will help them achieve "youth." Perpetrators prey on this and capitalize on this demand. The scam can be executed in different ways such as offering costly treatments that turn out to be either harmful or simply homeopathic remedies that do nothing but cost money.



The "Grandparent Scam"

This scam usually entails a perpetrator calling or emailing seniors **pretending to be a family member in trouble** or an authoritative person representing the relative (a lawyer, for example). The "relative" then asks for money to be wired to him or her to pay rent, lawyer fees, medical bills, or some other fake expense. The victim is often asked to not tell anyone, such as other family members, because the caller wants to keep the problem on the down-low. The older adult never hears from this "relative" again and is out of hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars.

Variations on this scheme have scammers contacting seniors through online dating sites or social media platforms such as Facebook. A senior has a legitimate profile or account and engages in correspondence with a scammer who builds trust and perhaps romantic interest. When the request for money comes after an "emergency," the senior is all too happy to indulge. Sometimes, scammers may even pretend to be lonely U.S. soldiers serving overseas.



Investment Schemes

Con artists know that seniors may have planned for retirement for years. So, scammers take advantage of retirees by **acting as financial advisors** to gain access to their savings and account funds. Once they get the information they need for access, they take the money and run.

>Another type of investment scheme entails the scammer taking advantage of the senior citizen's religious affiliation or other essential part of his or her identity. For example, for just \$500, the senior citizen could invest in an illustrated Bible for children and earn part of the royalties.

Investment schemes can also be about property and timeshare deals. They often use a sense of urgency and/or the promise of free gifts. If you have only a few hours to make an investment decision and can't call anyone about it, it's probably a scam.



Mortgage Scams

Many elderly people own their homes, which makes them an increased target for scammers. Con artists send out official-looking letters from an office such as the county assessor, and the letters claim that the homeowners can reduce their property tax burden but only after paying a fee. The letter does not have any information that is not available to the public, so that is one

giveaway of it being a scam. If homeowners believe there is any validity to a letter, they should call the county assessor's office directly.

Homeowners who are doing a reverse mortgage are also a **target of con artists**, as the reverse mortgage is a sign of unlocked equity that can be taken advantage of.



Funeral Fraud

Sadly, there are con artists who try to take advantage of grieving widows and widowers at funerals. Con artists keep track of obituaries to find their targets and either show up at the funeral or get the contact information of the surviving family members to say the recently deceased had outstanding debts that must be paid off.

Another funeral-related scam is by the funeral house itself. People generally don't go through funerals often and are unaware of the costs associated with one. Dishonest funeral homes tack on additional charges, so it is important to be aware of what a **funeral should actually cost**.





Bogus Magazine Sales

This type of scam entails young people knocking on doors to **sell magazine subscriptions** to “raise money” for a good cause, a school trip, or some other charity that the elderly are likely to fall for. Once the victim gives money, he or she will not receive any magazine subscriptions nor know where the money went.



IRS Impostor Scams

One of the most common scams is when someone pretends to be an IRS agent. This can happen over email, mail, phone and in person.

So-called IRS agents say that you owe taxes and demand that you pay immediately or face consequences such as jail time or hefty fines. In many cases, they say that the IRS has contacted you via mail or email already and never heard back, hence the need for dire measures now.

In some cases, they'll instead say you are owed a tax refund. In both scenarios, the goal is to get your credit card numbers or other financial information, and sometimes, money transfers.

If this happens via phone, hang up. If you feel the contact could be valid, call the IRS at 1-800-829-1040 to ensure you are speaking with someone legitimate. Signs of an IRS scam include:

Arrest threats

Rude language and behavior

Requests for credit card or debit card payments over the phone

Requests to pay with gift cards or prepaid cards

"Agents" refusing to give badge numbers and other ways to verify their legitimacy

Demands for payments right away

Are You a Victim of a Scam?

If you think you might be a victim of a scam, reach out to someone you trust such as a close friend or family member. Don't be afraid to talk to someone because doing nothing could make the situation worse.

Unfortunately, once money has been wired out, it is more than likely gone. However, that does not mean that there's nothing left for you to do. Other senior victims are counting on you to **report the details** so that the scams can be shut down. The AARP breaks down a **handy list**

of resources that are useful to keep readily available. Additionally, keep the phone numbers for your local police station and bank close by.

Conclusion

Con artists and scammers who prey on the elderly rely on two key things: The assumption that the elderly are unfamiliar with modern technology and that the elderly are unaware of all the different ways to have their personal information stolen.

This guide covers most of the scams that target seniors, but it always helps to be aware of anyone and anything trying to get money or personal information out of you.

Whenever you feel the least bit suspicious of an email, phone call, personal visit or anything else, you can try a simple google search about your suspicion. If the search pulls up something, then you'll know for a fact it is a scam to report and then ignore. If nothing comes up, it could be a new scam or one that hasn't been well documented. Be safe and aware!