

6 Tips to Avoid Senior Scams

Sign Up for Direct Deposit at Your Bank

There's no end to the creativity of scam artists, and seniors and people with low incomes are often the targets of scams. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to protect yourself from senior scams.

To avoid mail theft, avoid having checks mailed to your home.

If you receive any checks on a regular basis—like social security, disability, or stock dividends—have those checks deposited directly into your bank account.

Reduce Telemarketer Calls to Avoid Senior Scams

It can be hard to say no to a telemarketer, and that can mean financial disaster if you become a victim of a senior scam.

To avoid this situation, you can reduce the number of telemarketer calls you receive by registering with the federal government's "Do Not Call Registry."

You can register your land line phone or cell phone with the "Do Not Call Registry" online or by calling 1-888-382-1222.

Ignore Direct Mail Advertising to Avoid Senior Scams

Seniors are often the target of direct mail, which usually offers something for free or almost free but signs you up for further financial obligations.

If you receive a notice saying you won a contest or a cruise, read the fine print carefully for hidden costs to make sure it's not a senior scam.

And if you decide to consider the offer, ask someone you trust for a second opinion before you sign up.

Seniors: Look Out for Medicare Drug Discount Card Scams

Medicare drug discount cards are offered by a number of companies, and they can save you money. Unfortunately they are also popular with scam artists.

The best way to enroll for a Medicare-approved discount card--and avoid a senior scam--is by contacting Medicare directly for a list of approved companies. You can do this online or by calling 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227); or by contacting Spectrum Generations at 1-800-639-1553 (TTY:1-800-464-8703).

Medicare drug discount cards cannot be sold by phone or through door-to-door sales. In addition, you should not need to provide proof of income, because Medicare can access your records from the IRS. If you are asked to provide proof of income, including bank accounts, you may be dealing with a fraudulent company.

Assign a Power of Attorney

A power of attorney gives a trusted person of your choice the power to make key financial or life decisions for you if you become incapacitated. Unfortunately, many people are taken advantage of by perpetrators of senior scams when they become ill or injured and cannot make good decisions for themselves.

Having someone who is legally empowered to make choices for you can save you from improper management of your finances, and it's important to make execute your power of attorney **before** you become too ill to make this important decision.

Avoid Disclosing Personal or Financial Information to Avoid Senior Scams

Many senior scam perpetrators make calls or send email on behalf of a financial institution.

For example, they may say there's a problem with your bank or credit card account and ask you to verify the account numbers.

If you get one of these calls, ask for a name and phone number you can call back, and make that call to be sure you are dealing with a legitimate company. If you cannot verify that the request is legitimate, do not provide the information.