



Triad NEWSLETTER

SAFETY, CRIME PREVENTION, AND
HEALTHY LIVING FOR OLDER ADULTS

- Fall 2023 -



Will Anyone Know? Safety Nets for Living Alone

By Sarah Kruse, Communications Coordinator, AgeBetter Inc.

What if I fall and can't get up? What if I get sick and can't get to the phone? What if I don't wake up? How long will it be before anyone notices? If you or a loved one lives alone, you may often think—what will happen if ...? Whether or not you've lived alone for a long time or if this is all new to you, it is possible to employ a variety of creative and traditional methods to ensure your safety.

Find a Safety Buddy

Many people make a daily plan with a friend, neighbor, or family member to check in. It can be as simple as opening the blinds by a certain time of day, making sure the newspaper has been taken in, or an email or phone call to say good morning. A perk of the phone call is you can be sure to have a conversation with someone each and every day.

Automated Check-In Program

Sharing Active Independent Lives (SAIL) offers its Rise and Shine program to SAIL members. Members call an automated line to check in each morning before 10 a.m. If the member doesn't call in, a series of steps are launched to ensure the safety of each individual—starting with the staff calling the member and ending with a visit to the member's home and alerting emergency response professionals if needed. You can learn more at sailtoday.org or by calling SAIL at 608-230-4321. ([Continued on page 3](#))

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Welcome, David Wakely!

We are always looking for volunteers who enjoy writing and informing older adults about safety and healthy living topics. Another volunteer decided to share his talents with Triad. David, "Thank You" for volunteering to write for the Triad Newsletter. We can always use more help, so if you're interested in writing please email mthomsen@rsvpdane.org.

Surviving Winter's Challenges

By David Wakely, Triad Volunteer

Winter is a season that poses unique challenges for everyone, but seniors face distinct hardships that require special attention and care. As the temperature drops and snow blankets the landscape, we often find ourselves battling isolation, health issues, and the harsh elements.

Seniors are more susceptible to various health issues during winter. Cold temperatures can exacerbate chronic conditions like arthritis, making movement painful and difficult. Moreover, the immune system weakens with age, making us more prone to respiratory infections, such as flu and pneumonia. These conditions can escalate rapidly, leading to hospitalizations or worse if not managed carefully. One easy and wise thing to do is to review your status regarding vaccines for conditions ranging from COVID and flu to shingles, pneumonia and RSV.

Winter often brings social isolation for seniors. Fear of slipping on icy sidewalks or roads keeps many of us indoors, leading to feelings of loneliness and depression. Reduced sunlight can also impact mood, contributing to seasonal affective disorder (SAD). While a sub-zero walk in the park may be unappealing, don't neglect indoor activities with friends and family as well as organized activities such as clubs, church groups or senior center gatherings. Don't want to pull the frigid car out of the garage? While the ride services that RSVP offers is pretty much limited to medical appointments and meal delivery https://bit.ly/rsvpdane_ds, RSVP also has a BUS BUDDIES program that helps people learn to ride the bus. One of the volunteers is

the former head of Madison Metro. This is a valuable option to help seniors learn to get around the city without a car https://bit.ly/rsvpdane_bb.

For many living on fixed incomes, the increased cost of heating during winter can strain finances. Balancing expenses such as heating bills, warm clothing, and nutritious food becomes challenging. Financial stress can lead to anxiety, affecting overall well-being and the ability to cope with the season's demands. Check with your local utility to see if higher winter utility bills can be "averaged" over the year. And stores, restaurants and other places often have senior discounts that only reveal themselves when you ask!

Education and preparedness are key components in helping seniors navigate winter safely. Providing information about winter safety measures, proper clothing, and home heating tips can empower us to take necessary precautions. Caregivers and family members should also be educated on recognizing signs of winter-related problems.

Winter survival for seniors is a shared responsibility that involves communities, families, and individuals. Understanding the unique challenges and offering support ensures that seniors not only survive but thrive during the winter months. Through collective efforts, we can create a society where seniors are protected, valued, and able to enjoy a safe and fulfilling winter season.

Cultivating an Attitude of Gratitude

By Peggy Nolan, Triad Volunteer

Take a minute and think about your day so far. What has gone well? Maybe you had plenty of coffee and breakfast options. Perhaps the sun is shining on the leaves of nearby trees as they change color. What else can you be grateful for?

Research shows that [gratitude has a significant impact on health and happiness](#). Other studies show that [journaling daily correlates with increased happiness](#). So consider starting a daily gratitude practice.

To get started, choose something you do every day, like brushing your teeth. While you do it, make a list (in your head, on paper or even on your phone) of 3-5 things you're

grateful for. They can be anything from the mundane to the sublime – all that matters is that they're meaningful to you.

Give it some time to become a habit. You might find yourself feeling grateful throughout the day rather than just during your designated gratitude time.

Feeling grateful doesn't mean denying life's challenges. The human brain is wired to focus on negative things. Practicing gratitude simply helps your brain get back in balance. And that will make you happier in the long run. That's something to be thankful for.



(Will Anyone Know? ... from page 1)

Technology can also support safety at home. Organizations like VRI offer personal emergency response systems (PERS) that are worn on your wrist or as a necklace and allow you to call for help when you need it. Some versions allow the device to work when you are away from home using a cellular system. A number of smart

watches on the market feature medical alert options such as falls detection, heart monitoring, and the ability to reach 911 at the touch of a button.

Whichever method, or combination of methods you choose, it will be reassuring to you and your family and friends to know that you have a plan in place.

Holiday Pet Safety

By Jeanna M. Olson, Triad Volunteer

There's much to consider when it comes to pet safety during the holidays. And it's worth taking the time to think about how your pet fits into the festivities.

"Think carefully about the decorations you choose and where you put them," suggests the Dane County Humane Society (DCHS). Shiny decorations that dangle, such as tinsel, are among the most common obstructions surgically removed from cats. And sparkly objects that hang can be especially tempting for cats and young dogs.

"If cats eat things like string, hair ties, or tinsel, it can create what we call a linear foreign body," says DCHS Chief Shelter Veterinarian, Dr. Uri Donnett. "This means that one end of the string passes into the intestines, while the other stays anchored in the stomach or sometimes even in the mouth around the tongue. The GI tract tries to move the string along but can't, and instead this creates a lot of damage to the intestines. It's painful and can result in death if left untreated too long. Generally, these require an expensive surgery to remove the

foreign body."

Some cats will scale a Christmas tree like a gibbon and securing the tree will help prevent it from tipping over. Broken ornaments can result in intestinal blockages, cuts and toxicity, so consider using unbreakable ornaments made from non-toxic materials. Keep homemade, food-based ornaments out of your pet's reach, and be especially careful with decorations made from salt dough since it is bad for both cats and dogs.

"If you plan to hang salt dough ornaments from your tree, place them high where your dog cannot reach them, or better yet, avoid putting them out altogether," says the American Kennel Club (AKC). The amount of sodium used to make salt dough leads to salt toxicosis. Contact your veterinarian and the Pet Poison Helpline at 855-764-7661 if your pet consumes salt dough, says the AKC. Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, an unsteady gait, seizures, coma, or death. (The Pet Poison 24/7 helpline has an \$85 incident fee.)



Balsam, pine and cedar can be poisonous if your dog or cat decides to have a nosh, and water additives meant to extend the life of your Christmas tree, such as sugar or aspirin, can be harmful, says the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). They list Amaryllis, poinsettias, holly, mistletoe, lilies, and Japanese Yew among the holiday plants that are dangerous if eaten.

Even plain water in a tree stand could contain fertilizer, mold, or bacteria. Electric lights can burn, and your pet can get tangled in cords. Moreover, the cords can be chewed.

These caveats may remind you that pets can be stealthy little ninjas especially around food, and what is more delicious than holiday fare?



Bumpus hounds aside, well-seasoned turkey and pets do not go together. The roasted turkey on your table is not the same as a small amount of unseasoned, boneless, skinless bird. And the AVMA warns, "Eating turkey or turkey skin—sometimes even a small amount—can cause a life-threatening condition in pets known as pancreatitis.

Fatty foods are hard for animals to digest, and many foods that are healthy for people are poisonous to pets including onions, raisins and grapes. If you want to share a Thanksgiving treat with your pet, make or buy a treat that is made just for them."

And don't forget the cannoli. Whether you have a chow hound whose lips reach the pumpkin pie or a cat intrigued by kringle, most baked goods are too rich for them and are better kept out of reach. The AVMA warns, "Not only are they often too rich for pets; an artificial sweetener often found in baked goods, candy and chewing gum, xylitol, has been linked to liver failure and death in dogs."

Cats don't have sweet taste buds and are more likely to rip apart the package than feast on kringle. And it's generally thought that they aren't affected by xylitol in the same way as dogs, but they are sensitive to theobromine which is found in chocolate. [Much depends on the type of chocolate](#), dark chocolate being worse, and the size of the animal, but it can cause an increase in heart rate, agitation, tremors and seizures.

The DCHS recommends letting your guests know how much and what they can feed your pet. It's important to set limits and know how sneaky your cat or dog can be.

It's also important to remember that your pet may be as welcoming as a Walmart greeter, but it can be scary down there, for smaller pets especially, and sometimes holiday gatherings can be overwhelming. Making a special place for your pets to feel safe is a good idea as long as you keep an eye on them.

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The Importance of Staying Connected and Active This Winter

By Ashley Hillman, Falls Prevention Program Manager, Safe Communities

There's a chill in the air indicating that cold weather, snow, and ice are just around the corner. While we bask in the comfort of our sweaters and pumpkin spice lattes, soaking up the transitional weather between summer and winter, *it's important to remember that to stay healthy and upright, we need to maintain social connections and physical activity even as winter approaches.*

Many older adults report feeling socially isolated and/or lonely. Winter weather certainly doesn't help when weather conditions make it more difficult to get out and about to meet up with friends or attend an exercise class. As tempting as it is to bundle up under the covers with a good book or movie, staying active is important for both mental and physical health.

Icy sidewalks can be frightening, but there are many options for staying active during the winter. *With the appropriate equipment, it's often possible to safely go outside.* Yaktrax, which attach to your boots or shoes, and ice cane tips both provide more traction for walking on icy ground. Also wearing layers is important if you plan to exercise outside so that you can better regulate your body temperature.

If you're not keen on braving the elements, *there are now lots of programs available virtually that help improve balance.* Local programs such as Tai Chi and Ballroom Basics for Balance offer virtual programming, and you can also find some great videos online. Silver Sneakers has a library of videos, and most Medicare plans allow you to easily access them. Your living room, kitchen and bathroom can become your own personal gym if you incorporate simple exercises like toe raises while brushing your teeth or side-stepping down the length of your kitchen

counter. *The main thing is to KEEP MOVING! Less movement means loss of muscle mass for those important muscles that help you stand from a seated position, sit from a standing position, and safely step up or down from a curb.*

In addition to the falls prevention aspect of moving and staying engaged in some sort of programming, there's also a very important social factor. *Whether we're Facetiming or Zooming with loved ones who may not live nearby or chatting with a neighbor on the telephone, maintaining social connection is vital to our health.* According to the Office of the Surgeon General, inadequate social connection is as dangerous as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day. And according to a report released this year, "chronic loneliness and social isolation can increase the risk of developing dementia by approximately 50% in older adults. Additionally, lacking social connection increases the risk of premature death by more than 60%." The effects of Covid-19 have shed an even brighter light on how important social connection is through all stages of life. Balance-enhancing classes, both in-person and virtual, can help provide that social connection for many people.

This winter, try setting a goal to maintain social connections and to keep active! This can be done in whatever way YOU feel the most comfortable. *For more information about your individual interests, visit the Safe Communities website safercommunity.net or call Ashley Hillman at 608-235-1957 to find out which programs, in-person and virtual, are available near you.* We all want the autonomy to be independent and to live our lives the way we want. Staying connected and staying upright will help us to achieve those goals.

How to Keep Things Delightful When the Weather is Frightful

By Peggy Nolan, Triad Volunteer

Like it or not, it's winter in Wisconsin. Here are some tips to stay safe this season.

At Home

- Consider scheduling a **furnace inspection** to be sure everything's working properly. Make sure you have plenty of furnace filters and change them regularly.
- **Prevent pipes from freezing** with these tips from State Farm Insurance:
 - Make sure pipes are insulated.
 - Wrap them with heat tape or heat cables.
 - Seal air leaks around the pipes.
 - shut off and drain water leading to outside faucets.
 - Allow a faucet on an outside wall to drip warm water.
 - Maintain a consistent indoor temperature.
 - Open cabinet doors so heat can get to uninsulated pipes and appliances near outside walls.
- Ice dams form on your house when snow on your roof melts, runs down the roof and then refreezes after reaching the eaves, which are colder. Behind the ice dam, water can pool and back up under the roof covering, leaking into the attic or along exterior walls. State Farm Insurance says you can **prevent ice dams** by:
 - Making sure bathroom, kitchen, dryer and other exhaust fans always discharge outside, not into the attic.
 - Keeping the attic air temperature below freezing when the outside air tem-

perature is in the low 20s. This requires proper attic ventilation.

Outdoors

- Whether you're shoveling or using a snowblower, **don't overdo it**. Take breaks as needed. Smaller shovels are easier to handle than large ones, and shovels with ergonomic handles allow you to reach without having to bend far. Be sure to lift with your legs, not your back.
- Scatter plenty of **sand on your driveway and sidewalks** to prevent falls.
- Be sure to **dress appropriately, ideally in layers** that can be removed as needed and that wick moisture away from the skin. If your boots don't provide enough traction, consider adding YakTrax or similar grippers.

Travel

- Create a **winter weather safety kit** for your car consisting of:
 - Sand
 - Ice scrapers
 - A shovel
 - A flashlight and extra batteries
 - Extra winter hats/gloves/mittens
 - A first-aid kit
 - Water and granola bars
 - Warm blankets
 - A cell phone charger
- Get real-time **updates on road condition in Wisconsin** at 511wi.gov or by downloading the 511 Wisconsin mobile app.

Petty Theft Awareness

By Jim Jenkins, Triad Volunteer

I'm an RSVP volunteer at the Madison Police Department. I make follow-up phone calls to folks who have reported non-violent, low-loss crimes via the MPD self-reporting system. MPD does not have the resources to investigate many of these reports; there are just not enough officers available.

I don't speak for the MPD; I'm just a volunteer. But I've been doing this for several years, and I quickly realized that the same stuff happens over and over. Often, it's the result of an opportunistic thief taking advantage of someone who dropped their guard in a predictable way.

Here are some common complaints I see and my advice about how to guard against them.

Theft from Cars

"I left my car in the driveway and forgot to lock it just one night, and somebody stole my valuables."

"I went for a jog at the nature trail and when I came back my car window was smashed, and my valuables were missing."

Always lock your car, and double check that you did. Don't leave purses, spare keys, garage door openers, gifts, wallets, computers, etc., where a thief can make a quick smash and grab.

Frighteningly, guns are also stolen from trunks and glove boxes. Too often these guns are used in violent crimes. Never leave a gun in your car unattended.

Cars are always safer in a closed garage, but we often don't have that choice. Lock your car, every time!

Bike Thefts

"I ran into my girlfriend's house and left my bike on the porch. I figured it was safe, so I didn't lock it. When I came out ten minutes later, it was gone."

"We always keep our bikes in the back yard. We don't lock them; we have a chain link fence. Last night we lost three bikes."

Lock your bike. Always. Lock it to an immovable object like a railing, lamp post or bike rack, if possible. Close your garage door. Also, take a photo of your bike and jot down the make, model and serial number. Police need that information if the bike is recovered. Bikes aren't cheap and they deserve good locks, wherever you keep them.

Porch Pirates, Garage Goblins and Lobby Lifters

"The Amazon delivery is missing from the apartment mailroom. It's locked but things keep on disappearing."

"My package vanished off my porch. I have a Ring camera, but the thief was wearing an N-95 and a hoodie."

"I left the garage door open while I made a quick sandwich. Ten minutes later I chased two kids out but don't think they got anything. I wonder what happened to my garage door openers?"

Don't leave delivered items unsecured in public or open areas. Valuable things walk away. Thirty people may have a key to the apartment mailroom, and others come and

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go all day long. Video cameras may help to protect things that are left unattended, but often they don't. Hoodies and masks are commonplace, and the camera's night resolution makes identification difficult. And remember that garage door openers are keys to your castle. If a thief gets into your garage, they can often get into your home. Keep the door between your garage and your house locked, too.

Identity Fraud

"My bank statement showed a \$400 charge at Menards. I've never shopped there."

"Somebody applied online for a loan in my name at my bank."

"A guy called from the Sheriff's office and said I missed a court date. He had me pay the fine with Walmart gift cards."

Keep your passwords, PINs, phone codes, card and ID numbers to yourself and don't open email or texts from strangers. Never cooperate with a stranger who wants

payment with gift cards; they are becoming the scam artists' currency of choice.

Scammers have a thousand tricks and a billion targets. If you have any doubts call your bank or the [Better Business Bureau](#) for help. The [Federal Trade Commission is another great resource](#).

Random Thefts

"I left my iPhone on the bar while I went to the restroom. When I came back it was gone."

"I put my backpack on the seat next to me on the bus and when I woke up it was gone."

Take your valuables with you or secure them when you're not around. Thefts are usually crimes of opportunity. Crooks are always on the alert for unattended valuables.

These are the petty thefts I see every week in my volunteer role at the Madison Police Department. Many of them are preventable with a little common sense. **Lock up, keep your wallet in your pocket, your garage closed, your passwords to yourself and stay safe!**

(Holiday Pet Safety ... from page 5)

"If you know your pet darts out, either place them in another room and close the door, or in a kennel, or put a leash on them as guests are arriving or leaving to prevent your pet from becoming lost," says Lisa Bernard, DCHS Public Relations Coordinator. "Also, before the holidays get into gear, make sure your pet is [microchipped](#) and that the contact information linked to that microchip is up-to-date."

Finally, here are a few online pet safety resources.

ASPCA

[Plants Toxic to Cats](#)

[Plants Toxic to Dogs](#)

ASPCA Animal Poison Control (there's a charge for their services): 888-426-4435

National Capital Poison Center

[Christmas Ornament Hazards](#)