

Information & Advice

Helping you to help yourself

Living Alone Safely



Help the Aged

Endorsed by



WOMEN'S ROYAL
VOLUNTARY SERVICE

This leaflet is endorsed by WRVS. WRVS helps people maintain independence and dignity in their own homes and communities, particularly in later life.

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If you are reading this leaflet you are probably one of the many older people who live alone. Even if you are usually quite happy living by yourself you may sometimes feel lonely or isolated. This advice leaflet looks at some of the worries you may have if you live alone, and the practical things you can do to overcome them.

Security

Older people are unlikely to be victims of crime, but this does not stop us from worrying about what might happen. Living alone can increase feelings of vulnerability and anxiety about the security of your home. The **Crime Prevention Officer** at your local police station can give you expert advice on making your home more secure. They can also tell you about any **Neighbourhood Watch Schemes** in your area. Joining a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme is not only a good way to help prevent crime in your area, but can give you a valuable source of neighbourly help and advice.

If you need to improve your home security, there may be a scheme which will provide and fit things like door locks or a spyhole for you. Help the Aged runs a **HandyVan Scheme** in some areas – call **01255 473999** to find out if there is one near you, or for advice on finding other local schemes. Your Crime Prevention Officer or a local Age Concern group can also tell you about schemes in your area.

Safety

Accidents are a worry when you live alone. But just a few simple precautions can greatly reduce the risk of a trip or fall.

- Check for potential dangers such as loose carpets, trailing flexes and poor lighting over steps and stairs.
- Take special care when climbing in and out of the bath; a rubber mat and well-placed grab rails may help you to keep your balance.
- Avoid straining to reach high shelves or bending into very low cupboards as this may cause you to feel dizzy and lose your balance. Think about rearranging your cupboards and shelves so that everything you need is within easy reach.

For more information on security and safety at home, see Help the Aged's free advice leaflets 'Security in Your Home', 'Safety in Your Home' and 'Fire'.

Emergencies

Most people live on their own without ever having a serious accident. However, it is always worth preparing for the unexpected.

- Pin details of your doctor and close relatives or friends in an obvious place, perhaps behind the front door, so that people know who to contact in an emergency.
- Keep the phone numbers of your gas, electricity and water suppliers somewhere obvious - just in case you need to contact them quickly.
- The best people to help in an emergency are those living nearby. If you arrange a daily telephone call or quick visit to or from a neighbour, they will know when something is wrong - but remember to let them know if you plan to be away!

Think about getting a **community alarm**. If you are ill or have an accident and can't get to the telephone, a community alarm lets you contact a 24 hour response centre from anywhere in your home. Staff at the centre will then call out the best person to help you - perhaps a neighbour, relative or the emergency services. Your local council may operate a community alarm scheme; contact the housing department at your Town Hall to find out. Or you might be interested in Help the Aged's community alarm scheme, **SeniorLink**. You can find out more about SeniorLink by ringing the SeniorLink enquiry line on 01255 473999.

Enjoying life

Living a full life is important whatever your age! If you don't go out much or don't see your family and friends as often as you'd like, it is easy to become lonely and isolated. There are lots of positive things you can do to make your life more enjoyable – here are a few ideas.

- Find out if there are any lunch clubs, social clubs or day centres in your area. Your local **Age Concern** group or **WRVS** office will have details.
- Think about learning something new. Most local authorities run classes for people of all ages. If you would prefer to be with people your own age, the **University of the Third Age** has local groups which run classes and social events for older people.
- If you find it difficult to get out, you might be interested in a local visiting scheme. Many local groups such as **Age Concern** can arrange for a visitor to drop in to see you on a regular basis.

- If you like the idea of regular contact with new people, but are not sure about clubs or visiting schemes, why not consider writing to a pen-friend? You can find pen-friends through magazines for older people, such as **'Yours'**.
- Many local groups rely on voluntary help. If you have the time, why not volunteer? Not only will you be helping others, it can be a great way to meet new people and make new friends. Contact your local **Volunteer Bureau**, the **Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme (RSVP)** or **WRVS**, to find out what help is needed in your area.
- Pets can be good company if you live alone. However, looking after an animal can be expensive and hard work, so it is important to make the right choice of animal. If you don't think you could manage a dog or cat you might like to think about other smaller animals. For more advice contact a local animal welfare group such as the **RSPCA**.
- If you are living alone because someone close to you has died, you might find it helpful to contact **Cruse Bereavement Care**. Cruse offers free information, advice, support and counselling to people who have been bereaved.

Getting help at home

Looking after yourself and your home can mean a lot of hard work when you live on your own. If you are finding it difficult to manage, you may want to get some extra help.

The **social services department** of your local council may be able to arrange services such as a home help or meals on wheels (often provided by voluntary organisations such as **WRVS**).

If you need this type of help, contact the social services department and explain the difficulties you are having. They should arrange for someone to visit and 'assess' your needs. After this assessment, the council will decide what services they can offer you. You may have to pay for these services. For more information contact the social services department at your local council.

If you would prefer to find someone privately to help you at home, the **United Kingdom Home Care Association** can supply you with a list of agencies in your area which offer a home care service.

Help the Aged's free advice leaflet 'Help in Your Home' gives more information on getting help at home.

You may want more practical help with odd jobs around the home such as mending a leaking tap or fixing a loose tile on the roof. If you need this type of help, a local **Age Concern** group may be able to suggest a cheap and reliable tradesperson you could use. Or there might be a **WRVS Good Neighbours scheme** in your area.

If your home needs more substantial repairs and you would like to find out about the financial and practical help available, see our free advice leaflet 'Housing Matters'.

Getting around

If you live alone it is very important that you can get out and about to do shopping, go to social clubs, and visit friends and relatives. If you don't drive, or have problems using public transport, you might be interested in finding out about local transport schemes.

Some local transport schemes use volunteer drivers with their own cars to provide a door-to-door service.

Dial-a-Ride or **Ring-a-Ride** services use converted cars and minibuses to take you wherever you want to go in a local area. Your local **Citizens Advice Bureau**, **Age Concern** or **WRVS** group may be able to give you details of transport schemes in your area.

Winter

You need to keep warm to stay fit and well. If you don't have much money coming in fuel bills may be a problem, but **don't** be tempted to turn down your heating to save money. Instead, find out about other ways to reduce the cost of heating your home. Draughtproofing and insulating your home can make it more 'energy efficient' and reduce your fuel bills. It needn't be expensive and you may qualify for a grant towards the cost. See our free advice leaflet 'Keep Out the Cold' for more details.

Keep a good supply of basic foods so that you always have plenty to eat, even when bad weather makes it difficult to go shopping. For ideas on what to keep in your store cupboard, see our free advice leaflet, 'Healthy Eating'.

Help with money

If you are adjusting to life on a single income or finding that your pension does not stretch as far as it did, you may want to check that you are receiving all the benefits you are entitled to. Help the Aged's free advice leaflets 'Can You Claim It?' and 'Claiming Disability Benefits' explain about welfare and disability benefits for older people.

Other housing options

Not everyone is happy living alone. If you want to keep your independence but would like the security of having people close to hand, sheltered housing might be an option. Or maybe you are wondering if a care home would suit you. Our free advice leaflets 'Housing Matters' and 'Residential Care' offer advice on finding accommodation which will be right for you.

Helpful organisations

Age Concern

Phone 0800 00 99 66 for details of your local group.

Citizens Advice Bureau

Your local bureau will be listed in your phone book.

Cruse Bereavement Care

Cruse House
126 Sheen Road
Richmond
Surrey TW9 1UR
Tel: 020 8939 9530
Helpline: 0870 167 1677

Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme (RSVP)

237 Pentonville Road
London N1 9NJ
Tel: 020 7643 1385

RSPCA

Your local branch will be listed in your phone book.

The United Kingdom Home Care Association

42B Banstead Road
Carshalton Beeches
Surrey SM5 3NW
Tel: 020 8288 1551

University of the Third Age

26 Harrison Street
London WC1H 8JG
Tel: 020 7837 8838

Volunteer Bureau

Your local bureau will be listed in your phone book.

WRVS

Your local office will be listed in your phone book.

SeniorLine

SeniorLine is a free national advice and information service run by Help the Aged for older people, their relatives, carers and friends.

Trained advice workers offer free, confidential and impartial advice and information about:

- Welfare and disability benefits
- Community and residential care
- Housing options and adaptations
- Access to health and community services
- Equipment to assist independence
- Support for carers
- Agencies offering local practical help

Telephone: **0808 800 6565** Textphone (Minicom): **0800 26 96 26**
9am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. Your call will be free of charge.
If you are in **Northern Ireland**, contact SeniorLine on **0808 808 7575**.

Help the Aged produces a range of free advice leaflets for older people

Financial Leaflets

- Can You Claim It?
- Check Your Tax
- Claiming Disability Benefits
- Managing a Lump Sum
- Questions on Pensions
- Thinking About Money

Housing and Home Safety Leaflets

- Fire
- Help in Your Home
- Housing Matters
- Keep Out the Cold
- Living Alone Safely
- Residential Care
- Safety in Your Home
- Security in Your Home

Health Leaflets

- Bereavement
- Better Hearing
- Better Sight
- Bladder and Bowel Weakness
- Fight the Flu
- Fitter Feet
- Healthy Bones
- Healthy Eating
- Keeping Mobile
- Managing Your Medicines
- Shingles

Leaflets are free of charge and available in single copies for individuals or in large quantities for organisations. You can get leaflets in the following ways:

- by writing to the Information Resources Team
- by email on adviceleaflets@helptheaged.org.uk
- by faxing on 020 7239 1839

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