

AGE FRIENDLY Manitoba

FACT SHEET

Safety for Seniors: What You Should Know



**Manitoba Healthy Living,
Seniors and Consumer Affairs
Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat**
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Manitoba 

Have you ever felt you were being taken advantage of and you didn't know what to do?

Do you have an older friend or relative who needs help and you don't know what to do?

Consider these stories:

“I am not as independent as I used to be. I need help with certain tasks. I try my best to do things on my own and I know that it takes me longer to do things than it used to. My daughter helps me but I am ashamed to admit that sometimes she shakes me and even hits me.”

“My husband has always been very controlling. He has never hit me but lately he pressures me into sexual activity, even when I don't feel like it. He makes me feel guilty so I do.”

“I don't have a big family and have outlived most of my friends. My niece is the only family member I see regularly. I am 85 but still feel good and am able to do most things for myself. My niece calls me old and lazy and says I should be thankful I have her to take care of me.”

“I have been living with my daughter and son-in-law since my wife passed away. Last week, my son-in-law asked me to sign a power of attorney so he could help with my affairs. I'm not sure what this document is, but he is insisting I sign it.”

“A friend of mine moved from her apartment to her son's home a few months ago. I have only seen her twice since. Every time I phone I am told she is unavailable. Last week, I went to her son's place to see her. He never left us alone for a minute. I noticed a drastic change in her appearance. Her hair was messy, she didn't have her dentures in, and she had old food stains on her blouse. I am very worried about her.”

What is Abuse of Older Adults?

Abuse of older adults is any action or inaction by a person in a position of trust that harms the health or well-being of an older person. It can happen at home, in the community and in health care facilities. Abuse exists in many different forms. It can be physical, psychological, or sexual. Sometimes it is neglect and financial exploitation.

Research shows that the person who abuses a senior is often a family member and dependent on the older person for financial support, a place to live or emotional support.

Help is Available

Nobody deserves to be abused or neglected. If you or someone you know is being abused, you're not alone.

Many abused older adults are reluctant to identify themselves. They often feel embarrassed and ashamed, and decide not to take action against the people who mistreat them because they are afraid of being rejected by loved ones and forced to leave their homes. If you are being abused, help is available. There are ways to make you safer and work towards building a more respectful relationship.

Keep in mind, both older women and men can experience abuse. Older people can be abused and neglected regardless of their cultural background. Abuse is a complex matter and there are many factors involved.

What can I do? Where can I go for help?

If you or anyone you know is experiencing abuse, contact the Seniors Abuse Support Line.

Seniors Abuse Support Line

The toll free Seniors Abuse Support Line is a confidential service for older adults who are experiencing abuse. It provides information, support and counselling. Abuse line staff can also help connect people to resources and support services available in the community.

Call toll free: 1-888-896-7183

If you are worried about your immediate safety or the immediate safety of another person, call 911 or your local police service.

Who else can help?

There are people in your community who can help, including:

- a trusted neighbour
- regional health authority staff
- doctor
- police officer
- clergy
- another person you trust

What are the possible signs of abuse?

Physical and Sexual Abuse:

- depression, fear, anxiety
- unexplained injuries such as cuts, bruises, swellings
- injury where explanation does not fit evidence
- not wanting to get medical treatment
- visiting many different doctors and treatment facilities often
- fear and edginess in the presence of a caregiver or family member

Psychological Abuse:

- feelings of depression, fear, anxiety or agitation
- withdrawal or extreme passivity
- feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- older person appears nervous around the abuser
- older person is excluded from discussions and major decisions
- difficulty visiting, calling or contacting the older person
- giving excuses for social isolation

Financial Abuse:

- standard of living not matching senior's income
- unexplained or sudden difficulty in paying bills
- refusal to spend money without agreement of caregiver
- missing possessions
- signing documents without understanding them
- unusual bank account activity by persons in positions of trust

Neglect:

- malnourished
- missing dentures, glasses, hearing aids, prosthesis, walking aids
- poor hygiene, bed sores
- unattended for long periods or being restrained to bed or chair
- unkempt appearance such as dirty or inappropriate clothing
- untreated medical problems
- over-mediated, or not responding to prescribed medication

For more information, please call:

Seniors Abuse Support Line: **1-888-896-7183**

*** In an emergency, call 911
or your local police service.**

The Protection for Persons in Care Office

If you are concerned that someone living in a personal care home, hospital or any other health care facility is experiencing abuse, contact the Protection for Persons in Care Office:

In Winnipeg: 204-788-6366

Toll Free: 1-800-855-0511

Deaf Access Line TTY/TDD: 204-786-7132, toll free: 1-800-855-0511

Things you can do to keep safe:

- Understand your rights as an older person. You have the right to live free from all types of abuse and to make your own decisions.
- Stay sociable by participating in community activities that you enjoy. Ask trusted friends to visit often.
- Develop a buddy system with a friend outside the home. Plan for at least weekly contact and communicate openly with this person. Choose a person who respects and supports your decisions.
- Keep track of your finances by sending and opening your own mail. Review your bank statements regularly.
- Arrange to have your pension cheques or other income deposited directly into your bank account. You can also have your bills paid directly from your bank account.
- Discuss future plans with your attorney, physician, elder, clergy or trusted family members.
- Get legal advice about arrangements you can make now in case something happens and you are no longer able to make decisions. This may include a power of attorney and a health care directive.
- If someone is making you feel uncomfortable, anxious or afraid, document the things they are doing to make you feel this way. Write down the dates, times and what was done or said.
- Keep a list of emergency services close by. Keep an extra list in your purse or wallet.
- Keep accurate records, accounts and lists of property and assets. Only allow this list to be examined by someone you trust.
- Review your will and do not make changes to it without discussing it with a trusted family member or friend.
- Only give up control of your property or assets when you decide you want to make this change.
- Ask for help or information when you need it. Professionals are available to help.

Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat

The Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat reports to the Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs to ensure the needs and concerns of seniors are reflected through a co-ordinated and comprehensive framework of legislation, public policy and programs. It provides a central source of information and referral for seniors and their families, seniors' organizations and government departments.

For more information about programs and services for seniors, please refer to the Manitoba Seniors' Guide. For a copy of the guide please call: **204-945-6565**; toll free **1-800-665-6565**; or visit the Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat website at **www.gov.mb.ca/shas**