

# 21.4 *your* estate matters

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## Safety for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Safe Is Always Better Than Sorry

Technological advances are designed to make your life easier, but unfortunately they can also make life easier for identity thieves. Wi-Fi makes accessing the internet easy, but information transmitted over wireless networks can be captured without your knowledge. Passports that are read through a scanner may make getting through airport security easier, but a person in line behind you could intercept your name, nationality, gender, date of birth, and even a digital copy of your photo. The same could be true for the chip embedded in many new credit cards.

So what can you do to stay ahead of identity thieves? An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

When you access Wi-Fi hot spots, always choose a wireless network that requires a login and a password. While slightly inconvenient, most networks that require a password are also encrypted. (Note, any public Wi-Fi network may allow your computer to be seen by hackers, which would alert them to the presence of a potential victim). Avoid sending

data like PINs, account numbers, usernames, passwords, and other sensitive information. If you don't enter the information, it cannot be stolen.

Consider purchasing an RFID-blocking wallet or sleeve to protect your passport and credit cards. RFID-blocking wallets help protect you from a form of electronic pickpocketing called RFID skimming. When activated by an RFID reader, chips transmit information wirelessly. That means a person with an RFID reader may be able to activate your chips and pick up the information they are designed to transmit.

Speaking of convenience, while it is certainly handy to let websites save your username and password, if you lose your laptop or phone that means identity thieves can easily access your information—and possibly your money—on those websites. It might seem like a pain to enter your username and password each time, but imagine how painful it will be if your personal information falls into the wrong hands.

## Habits of People Who Don't Get Sick How Many Do You Follow?

- 1. They get enough rest.** People who sleep less than seven hours a day are three times more likely to get sick.
- 2. They don't smoke.** Smoking makes people twice as likely to catch a cold and three times as likely to catch the flu.
- 3. They get a flu shot.** The vaccine not only helps prevent illness, it can also lower the risk of a major cardiac event.
- 4. They exercise.** Women (and presumably men) who exercise are half as likely to catch a cold than those who don't.
- 5. They stay clean.** Many microbial threats can be washed away with soap and water and 20 seconds of scrubbing.
- 6. They make friends.** People who regularly interact with friends and family are one-fourth as likely to catch a cold. (And they probably laugh more, which can increase their immune response.)
- 7. They drink an occasional glass of wine.** A glass or two of red wine is protective against colds... but keep in mind that drinking more than two increases the risk of getting an infection.

## Make Your Home Alzheimer's Friendly

### Simple Ways to Keep Your Loved One Safe

Most of us recognize the need to make changes to assist a person suffering from the loss of mental faculties associated with Alzheimer's disease. Sometimes forgotten is the need to make physical changes to a home in order to keep loved ones safe both inside and outside the home.

You can start by making simple changes to the living area. Remove clutter and potential tripping hazards. Try not to move furniture around. That way the home will still feel familiar. Clean out closets and drawers so frequently used items are easy to find. Make sure rooms are well lit so furniture and other items are easy to see and recognize. Consider safeguarding sharp and potentially dangerous items by storing them in locked cabinets or in locations your loved one cannot access. Do the same with medications, cleaning supplies, and any other chemicals or potentially harmful substances.

Then focus on protecting your loved one from aimless wandering. While walking is a great way for older people to stay active, a short stroll in the yard could turn into a long walk through unfamiliar streets, the perils of traffic, heat exhaustion, and less than friendly strangers. Locking doors from the inside may not help (unless the lock is keyed on both the inside and outside), so consider motion sensors, home alarms, and possibly even GPS tracking devices that help you locate your loved one if they do manage to wander away. You may also consider adding a tag to their clothing with the name and phone number of who to contact I.C.E. (In Case of Emergency). Don't forget to secure gates and other access points in the yard.

Finally, keep in mind that Alzheimer's and dementia are progressive and a sufferer's capacities, both mental and physical, are likely to change over time. Frequently re-evaluate the precautions you put in place and make changes whenever necessary.

## The Importance of Estate Planning Solutions for Dementia

### Legal and Financial Planning Are Key

Alzheimer's disease affects one in ten people over the age of 65 and over half of people over age 85. It accounts for approximately 60-80% of dementia cases, an umbrella term that describes an often progressive degenerative syndrome that results in loss of memory, hindered thinking and language skills, and behavioral changes.

While you, or someone you love, may not be able to avoid dementia, you can plan ahead to mitigate the legal and financial repercussions you are likely to face.

First, create property and healthcare Powers of Attorney to ensure that someone you trust can take over your affairs if you are incapacitated and unable to make your own medical and financial decisions.

Next, consider creating a Revocable Trust for your assets. If you are concerned that your beneficiaries do or will have dementia, your Trust can leave assets to them in a Trust over which they do not have control. If they may need to qualify for public benefits such as Medicaid, you will want to leave the assets in a Special Needs Trust. If the beneficiary in

question is your spouse, the Special Needs Trust must be a "testamentary" Special Needs Trust established in conjunction with your Will.

If you or your spouse may have dementia, you will want to consider that you may need an assisted living facility or other assistance in the future. This type of assistance can be quite costly. If you qualify, long-term care insurance is one option. Another possibility is Medicaid. But, this option is very complicated and has strict financial requirements. You must plan years in advance because Medicaid has transfer penalties if you give away your assets within five years of when you need it. If you plan ahead, you have options. Those options include gifting assets to your children or to an Irrevocable Medicaid Trust. Some non-exempt assets could be converted to exempt assets. For example, you could purchase a funeral plan that is irrevocable.

But, the sooner you start, the more effective the Medicaid planning will be. If you or a loved one suffers from dementia (or may in the future), call our office to schedule an appointment.

## What's in a Legacy?

Many people remember him as a wellspring of fatherly advice, but he worked just as tirelessly on behalf of animals. He was one of the first celebrities to lend his name and influence to the cause.

In 1989, he co-founded a dog food company focused on improving health and wellness for dogs. In 2008, he established National Guide Dog Month, an event dedicated to raising awareness and funds for non-profit guide dog schools.

He was the patriarch of a famous Hollywood family, played “Tom Bradford” on the hit television show *Eight Is Enough*, and over time became known as “America’s dad,” but his memory also lives on through his words on the back of every bag of Natural Balance pet food: “Help me help animals.”

**Dick Van Patten** spent his life as not just an advocate but an active participant helping improve the quality of life for animals.

What will your legacy be?

## Incapacity and Firearms: When Is It Time to Give Up Your Guns?

At some point, many people face a tough decision: Due to physical or mental changes, is it time for us or a loved one to stop driving? While that is a difficult conversation, it is one with which many are familiar. But what about firearms?

When, due to a loss of physical or mental capacity, is it time to permanently put guns away?

Studies show that one in three Americans own a gun. Some are purchased, others are inherited, and some are family heirlooms destined to be passed on to future generations. The combination of widespread gun ownership and an aging population has made firearm removal a burden loved ones face when caring for older relatives, just like taking away the car keys or taking over the checkbook.

There is definitely cause for concern. In 2014, over 5,000 people 65 and older committed suicide using a firearm and more than 200 killed someone else. Firearm deaths relating to dementia should only increase as the population ages—and even if the rate does not increase, one avoidable death is too many.

So what can you do? Think about the possibility of removing firearms before it is necessary. When it does become necessary, include your loved one in the conversation and, if possible, make passing on the gun part of a family tradition. Don't just take away the bullets, since police or rescue workers will not realize the gun is not loaded.

Most importantly, understand the conversation might be difficult, but is also extremely important. Keep your loved ones safe, especially when they are no longer able to do so themselves.