Staying Safe When You're Out and About Alone as an Older Adult

Why planning ahead matters for solo outings

For many older adults, maintaining independence means running errands, meeting friends, or simply enjoying a walk without company. These everyday activities bring real benefits, fresh air, exercise, social connection, but they also come with moments of vulnerability. A sudden dizzy spell, a missed step, or an unexpected change in weather can turn a routine trip into a worrying situation. The key is not to stop going out, but to build simple habits that add a layer of security without making you feel like you are carrying a burden.

This article walks through practical steps you can take before and during solo outings. Each step focuses on what to watch for and how to stay in control, so you can enjoy your time out with more confidence.



Step 1: Check your readiness before you leave

Preparation starts at home. Before stepping out, take a moment to assess how you feel physically. Are you well rested? Have you eaten and taken any regular medications? Dehydration or low blood sugar can cause lightheadedness, so a small snack and a drink of water are wise before heading out, especially in warm weather.

Dress for the conditions and for comfort. Wear sturdy, non-slip footwear and clothing that suits the forecast. If you are walking at dusk or at night, choose light-coloured or reflective clothing so drivers and cyclists can see you. Consider carrying a small flashlight or wearing a headlamp, even in well-lit areas, shadows can hide hazards like uneven pavement or tree roots.

Charge your phone fully and keep it accessible, not buried at the bottom of a bag. If you carry a personal GPS alarm, check that its battery is charged and that the device is set to your usual preferences, such as location sharing or an emergency contact list. Some devices let you test the connection before you go, which gives peace of mind.



Step 2: Choose your route and share your plan

Decide where you are going and how you will get there. Stick to routes you know well, and avoid shortcuts through alleys, vacant lots, or poorly lit areas. If you are trying a new path, walk it once during daylight with someone else before attempting it alone.

Let someone know your plan. A quick text or a call to a family member or friend with your expected route and estimated return time can make a big difference. If you have a device with GPS location sharing, turn that feature on before you leave. That way, someone you trust can see your progress and check in if you stop moving for longer than expected.

Pay attention to mobile coverage along your route. In some areas, particularly rural or hilly spots, signal drops are common. If your personal GPS alarm relies on a mobile network, a dead spot can prevent an SOS alert from getting through. Check coverage maps from your provider before you set out, and consider a device that stores the alert and sends it when coverage returns.

Step 3: Stay aware of your surroundings while walking

Once you are outside, keep your focus on the path ahead and the environment around you. Avoid wearing headphones at high volume or looking down at your phone for long stretches. These distractions make it harder to notice a loose paving stone, an approaching vehicle, or someone who seems to be following you.

View this on familyr.co.nz

If you feel uneasy at any point, trust that feeling. Cross the street, step into a shop, or pause near a bench until the moment passes. Your safety matters more than sticking to a schedule.

Carry your personal GPS alarm where you can reach it without fumbling, on a lanyard around your neck, clipped to a belt loop, or in a pocket that you use often. Practice activating it once or twice at home so the motion becomes automatic. In a real emergency, you want to press the SOS button without hesitation.

Watch for trip hazards: cracked footpaths, loose gravel, wet leaves, and kerbs with a steep drop. If you use a walking stick or a rollator, check that its tips are not worn down. A small stumble can lead to a fall, and falls are the most common reason older adults end up in hospital.

Step 4: Stay safe while shopping or running errands

Supermarkets, malls, and busy streets present different risks than open footpaths. Crowds can be disorienting, and the combination of trolleys, display stands, and slippery floors creates a maze of hazards.



When shopping, keep one hand free to steady yourself. Use a trolley for balance if you need it, and avoid carrying multiple bags that block your view of the ground. If the store is crowded, wait a few minutes near the entrance until the flow of people eases, or shop during quieter hours, early morning or mid-afternoon on weekdays.

Keep your valuables close. Pickpockets and bag snatchers target older adults because they are often slower to react. Wear a cross-body bag or a money belt under your coat, and never leave your purse or phone unattended in a shopping trolley.

If you start to feel unwell, dizzy, nauseous, or short of breath, find a seat or lean against a wall. Alert a staff member or call a family member using your phone or your personal GPS alarm. Two-way voice features on some alarms allow the monitoring team to speak to you directly and assess your situation without you needing to explain everything.

Step 5: Use technology as a safety net, not a crutch

Devices like a personal GPS alarm are most useful when they complement your own awareness, not replace it. They offer a way to call for help if you cannot reach your phone or if you are unable to speak clearly. The best approach is to set up the device so it works quietly in the background, checking your location periodically, sharing it with a trusted contact, and sending an alert only when you press the button or when a fall is detected.

Some systems let you set a geofence around your home. If you wander outside that boundary, which can happen with confusion or dementia, the device notifies your family member automatically. This feature adds security without intruding on your privacy during a normal outing.

View this on familyr.co.nz

Battery life matters. A personal GPS alarm that runs out of charge halfway through a walk is no help at all. Charge yours overnight or whenever the manufacturer recommends, and carry a small power bank if you plan to be out for many hours. Check the battery indicator before you leave each time.

For those who prefer a non-wearable option, some alarms come as small units that fit in a pocket or clip to a key ring. The principle is the same: reachable, charged, and set up with the right emergency contacts.

Step 6: Know how to handle an emergency

Even with good preparation, emergencies happen. If you fall and cannot get up, stay calm. Press the SOS button on your personal GPS alarm if you have one. If you do not have a device, call out for help or bang on a nearby wall or floor to attract attention. Carry a whistle, it is louder than your voice and carries farther.

If you feel threatened by another person, move toward a public area with other people. Shout or use the alarm to draw attention. Do not worry about being polite or causing a scene, your safety is the priority.



In medical emergencies such as chest pain, severe dizziness, or breathing trouble, do not wait to see if it passes. Activate your alarm or call emergency services immediately. Delaying can make a bad situation worse.

If you have a family-monitored service like the one offered by familyr.co.nz, the SOS alert goes to people who know you and can respond quickly. That personal connection often means faster, more reassuring help than a general call centre. Familyr provides family-monitored personal medical alarms in New Zealand with SOS alerts, GPS location sharing, fall detection, two-way calling and lifetime support without monthly monitoring fees. Many users find that knowing their family will be alerted gives them more confidence to go out alone.

Step 7: Review and adjust your routine

After each solo outing, take a moment to think about what went well and what felt tricky. Did you feel safe the whole time? Was there a moment when you wished you had brought something, a phone charger, a warmer jacket, a walking stick? Small adjustments make the next trip smoother.

Talk to your family or friends about your experiences. They may have suggestions you had not considered, such as a different bus stop or a more level walking route. Sharing your routine with them also keeps them informed, so they know what to expect and when to check in.

View this on familyr.co.nz

As you grow more comfortable with your safety habits, you can gradually extend your range, try a new shop, visit a park you have not seen in years, or meet a friend for coffee at a cafe a little farther from home. The goal is to keep living your life with confidence, not to shrink your world.

If you are considering a personal GPS alarm, look for one that matches your daily activities. Check that it works in your area, that the battery lasts long enough for your longest outings, and that the emergency contacts are people you trust. A device like familyr.co.nz offers features designed for older adults who value independence but want a reliable safety net. With the right preparation and a little technology on your side, staying safe while out alone becomes a natural part of your day.