

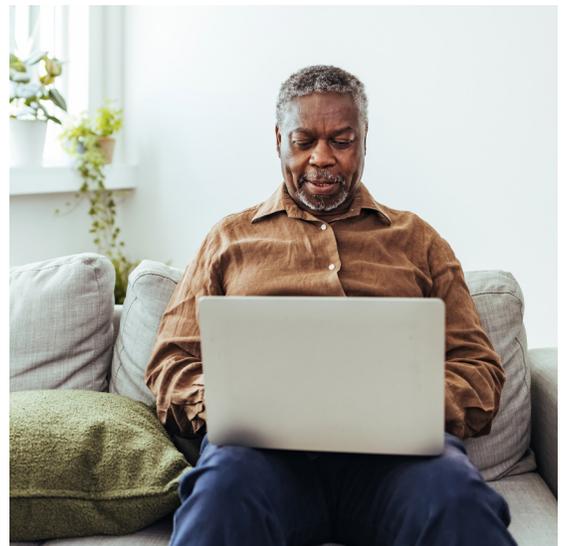
Online Safety for Older Adults: Browsing the Internet Confidently

The internet has become an important tool for daily life—playing a critical role in connecting with others, exploring new information and places, and conducting business. This makes knowing how to use the internet safely essential. This fact sheet includes best practices to help you do so.

Pop-Ups

Many websites have pop-ups, those small browser windows that suddenly appear in the middle of the screen. Pop-ups are a way for websites to draw your attention and are often used as an advertisement. They often aim to re-direct you to another site. Most pop-ups are just a nuisance and are not harmful.

 **ACTION STEP:** If you encounter pop-ups, look for the “X” to close it. The “X” is often intentionally hard to find. It will generally appear in one of the corners of the pop-up window. If you happen to click on the pop-up itself, do not panic. You can select the back button in your browser or close the tab or window. Avoid clicking on the page that opens as a result of the pop-up.



Ads and Sponsored Content

When you use a search engine like Google, the first several search results will be advertisements. You will know they are ads because they will be labeled “Ad,” and they are often the top three search results. Scrolling past the ads and carefully reading the website address or URL of the search results can make for a better browsing experience.

Sponsored or paid content is another type of advertisement you will encounter on the internet. These ads are designed to be subtle and blend in with the rest of the content on a webpage, making it difficult to tell the difference between sponsored content and the actual content of a

webpage. You will also find sponsored content on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These posts blend into your feed, and you may not realize at first glance that they are ads.

 **ACTION STEP:** Ads and sponsored content are often, but not always, labeled as “Sponsored” or “Promoted.” Always check the byline and description of a video for signs that it might be an ad before you click to watch.

Website Spoofing

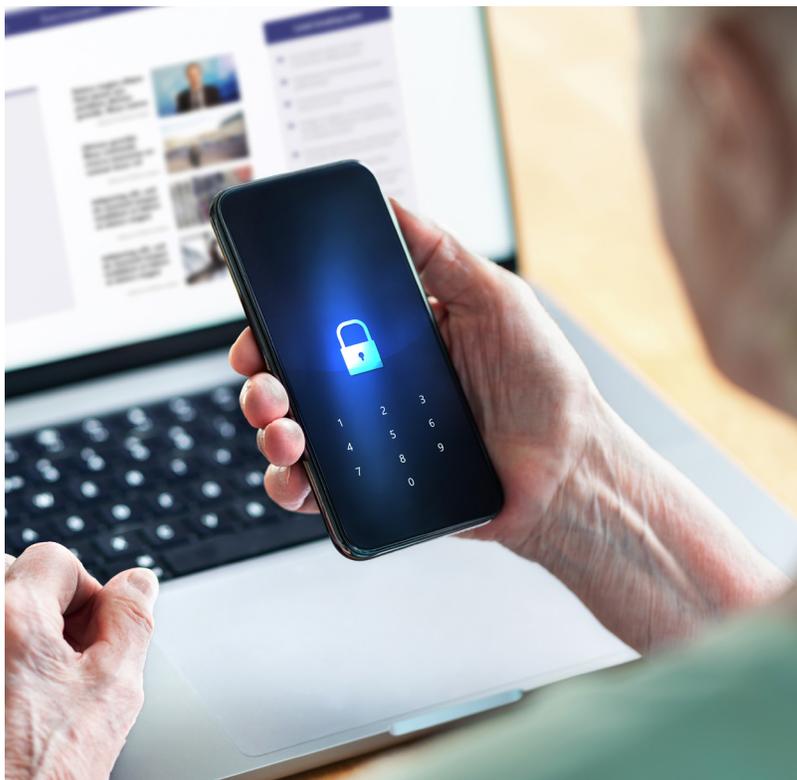
A spoofed website is one that is designed to look like a legitimate site but is actually a website that will capture any information you enter. Once the websites obtain your personal information, the people behind them then use or sell the information. These spoofed websites often have similar URLs as legitimate websites. For example, the URL for a website spoofing Bank of America’s site may be missing a letter, such as www.bankoamerica.com.

 **ACTION STEP:** If you use Google Chrome as your web browser, make sure that “Safe Browsing” is turned on so that the browser can catch any mistakes. You can do this by going to **Settings** → **Privacy & Security** → **Security** and selecting the level of Safe Browsing you want. We recommend choosing **Enhanced Protection**.

Secure Websites

Websites with https in their URL have added an extra level of security that safeguards any information you enter on the site—the “s” stands for “secure.” Websites that do not include the “s” (http) are not necessarily unsafe; they simply did not take the extra step to ensure a secure connection.

 **ACTION STEP:** If you enter sensitive information (e.g., your address, phone number, banking information, credit card number, Social Security Number, etc.) while browsing online, you should only do so if you see https in the website address and trust the organization or company.



Tips for Evaluating Information Online

Remember that anyone can post false or misleading information on the internet. When evaluating whether information is accurate and trustworthy, ask yourself whether you are using the correct website domain extension—.com, .org, .gov, etc.—for the type of information you are seeking.

Here are additional questions that can help you determine whether the information you are reading online is accurate.

- Who owns and runs the website?
- Who wrote the information?
- Is this organization or person knowledgeable?
- Is this organization or person reputable?
- Are they trying to sell you a product?

Resources

For more information on how to browse safely online, visit the Senior Planet website (www.seniorplanet.org) or call the Senior Planet Hotline at (888) 713-3495. For additional resources and support, contact the Eldercare Locator at (800) 677-1116 or eldercare.acl.gov.

Remember...

As with most of the things we do every day, there are risks associated with using the internet, but the benefits of enjoying online activities and connecting virtually outweigh the risks. Keeping in mind the tips and best practices presented in this fact sheet will help you explore and connect with others online safely and with confidence!

This fact sheet is part of a series of fact sheets on online safety for older adults. Visit www.engagingolderadults.org to learn about the other fact sheets in this series.

This fact sheet was produced by engAGED: The National Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults in partnership with Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) from AARP. OATS serves on the engAGED Project Advisory Committee. engAGED is administered by USAging and funded by the U.S. Administration for Community Living. For more information, visit www.engagingolderadults.org.

This project #90EECC0002 is supported by the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$450,000 (or 74 percent) funded by ACL/HHS and \$161,554 (or 26 percent) funded by non-government sources. The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

August 2023