



Live Healthy Georgia

Seniors Taking Charge

Social Networking 101 for Seniors

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Facebook . . . Twitter . . . LinkedIn. If these names are familiar, you likely contributed to the finding by the Pew Internet Research & American Life Project that over 26% of older adult internet-users use social networking. If not, read on to find out the good and bad of this new way of communicating.

What is Social Networking?

Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are web sites that allow you to create a “public or semi-public profile,” define a list of users with whom you share a connection, and display this information within the networking site. Essentially, you can share information about what makes you “you,” add “friends” or “followers,” and then see who else has your interests, friends, or followers in common. But why would anyone want to do this?

Top Reasons for Using Social Networking

1. Staying in touch with current friends.
2. Staying in touch with family members.
3. Connecting with old friends you’ve lost touch with.
4. Connecting with others with similar hobbies/interests.

Benefits of Social Networking

While some social networking sites began as self-promotional venues, the majority of sites allow users to stay connected with friends and family members. These connections are important because they:

- Strengthen support systems.
- Decrease feelings of isolation or loneliness.
- Allow friends and family to instantaneously share life events and memories.
- Provide a place for new friendships and interests to form.

Danger Zones of Social Networking

As with all computer-based activities, there are potential risks of being “scammed.” Some criminals create fake profiles to gain the trust of users and then send out an e-mail directing recipients to a scam web site. Similarly, other criminals imitate a potential victim’s interests based on the profile, develop a relationship with the potential victim, and may directly ask for money or a donation. Other problems may not involve criminal intent but emotionally drain the user. Some “needy” users may constantly message someone they barely know or ask repeatedly for advice about problems.

Protecting Yourself Online

- ✓ **Check your privacy settings.** On Facebook, for example, you can “show” your status updates to only friends or friends of friends instead of your entire network. Also, there may be settings for how members can contact you.
- ✓ **Only accept “friend requests” from people you know.** On Twitter and similar “public” sites, it’s a little more difficult to block followers (everyone wants followers!). In this case, be careful about what you post in status updates. If you are uncomfortable with having someone “follow” you, do not use such social networking sites.
- ✓ **Think about what your profile and pictures say about you if they are public.** Of course, we want to share information about ourselves with the world. However, it is a good practice to not share information that may make you seem vulnerable (i.e., I sprained my ankle and my family is out of town).
- ✓ **Do not respond to messages or requests from people you do not know personally.** Especially, do not agree to meet a new “Facebook friend” alone.



Pictures:

http://www.aoa.gov/aoaroot/press_room/social_media/wid/get/statistical_profile/2010/images/couple_and_laptop.jpg

<http://static2.consumerreportscdn.org/cro/cdn-resources/images/electronics-computers/computers-internet/internet-and-other-services/protect-yourself-online/overview/cr092k8-leadart.jpg>

Social Networking Sites to Try

Facebook: Share status updates, pictures, videos, and web sites with “friends.” You can send and accept “friend requests,” as well as “like” fan pages and “join” groups of interest.

Twitter: Share short (140 characters) status updates, pictures, videos, and web site links with “followers.” People can click to follow you, or you can restrict your settings to approve followers. You can “follow” celebrities, politicians, and others to read their status updates, too!

Pinterest: Create “boards” (collections of pictures and videos) to share with followers. “Pin” items by copying and pasting the web address. People can choose to follow you or follow individual boards.

Get Glue: “Check In” with what you’re watching on television, at the movies, or what you’re listening to. Some users may subscribe to your “stream” to see your “check-ins,” and you can see what other people are watching or listening to. Earn “virtual stickers” by checking in.

LinkedIn: Professional networking site, allows you to list what you do and where you have worked. It also encourages reconnecting with former classmates.

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