

Q: I've been widowed for five years, but I still don't feel safe dating someone new. Last week, a man I'd just met asked me to fly to spend the weekend in Atlantic City as his guest. Should I accept? *Jeanne B, Pittsburgh PA*

A: Seniors should practice similar self-protective routines as people of all ages need to do when dating. In the ongoing battle of the sexes for any age, just use your common sense. Here are some tips to help seniors participate in the battle without suffering wounds of the heart or soul.

Before you agree to go anywhere, and especially if the situation is a first date, such as a stranger you've contacted on an internet dating service, arrange a brief meeting. Don't agree to the weekend in Atlantic City until you get to know him better. First get together at a public place, such as a small cafe, for a lunch or snack.



Don't be afraid to ask him personal questions. If the meeting makes you in any way nervous or suspicious about the person, politely end the meeting and refuse all further connection. It just isn't worth the risk of spending a weekend with him if you don't feel it is right. On the other hand, as some of my lonely old pals recommend, if you feel OK about him, go for it!

Whether you agree to a casual evening or a weekend-long date, always let friends and family know in advance what you expect to do and where you'll be. Then, at some time during the date, with your handy cell phone, call to reassure them of your safety.

Health is an important concern for seniors who may be vulnerable to medical problems, not just during a social evening, but at any time of the day or night. If you're on regular medications that must be taken at specific times, bring them with you.

Limit eating and drinking to what you'd normally consume at home. Too often, at parties, buffets, cruises and other festive activities, seniors are tempted to indulge thoughtlessly. A date that ends with long sessions in the bathroom or a trip to the hospital emergency ward isn't likely to result in future dates with the same companion.