

A Guide to Gun Ownership for the Elderly14 minute read

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If there is one issue that has been—and continues to be—very heavily debated in the United States today, it is gun ownership. Most folks are either for it or against it, very few fall somewhere in between.



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Gun Control Versus Gun Rights

Three out of five felons say they wouldn't commit a crime against someone who is known to be armed.

Regardless of which side of the fence individuals are on with regard to guns, many rely on statistics and data obtained from various pieces of research to help them qualify their positions.

For instance, the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence published an [article](#) that points to research that found that gun owners are typically angry, impulsive men who choose to carry guns because of a "crisis of confidence."

The article goes on to say how studies have revealed that the mere act of holding a gun can make people paranoid and those who oppose gun reform are more often than not racist risk takers.

What do gun rights activists have to say about all of this?

Perhaps the largest gun rights organization in America, the [National Rifle Association – Institute for Legislative Action \(NRA-ILA\)](#) contends that it is an American's basic right to carry, a right afforded under the Second Amendment, which is the right to keep and bear arms.

Statistics used to support gun rights include those offered by [American Gun Facts](#), which indicate that in any given year a gun is 80 times more likely to be used to protect someone's life versus to take one. Additionally, the site says women use guns approximately 200,000 times annually to keep from being sexually abused, and three out of five felons say they wouldn't commit a crime against someone who is known to be armed.

American Gun Facts also says that, while the U.S. has the highest gun ownership rate in the world, it is ranked #103 for highest homicide rates, providing further proof that guns do not necessarily equal death.

Sixty-seven percent of gun owners cite self-protection as their primary objective. [The Pew Research Center](#) lists the other reasons Americans have firearms:

- hunting (38 percent)
- sport shooting (30 percent)
- as part of a gun collection (13 percent)
- for their jobs (8 percent)

What do experts have to say about gun ownership for the elderly specifically?

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The chance of being victimized is lower for individuals 65 and older than for other age groups, but this portion of the population generally has more fear when it comes to personal safety



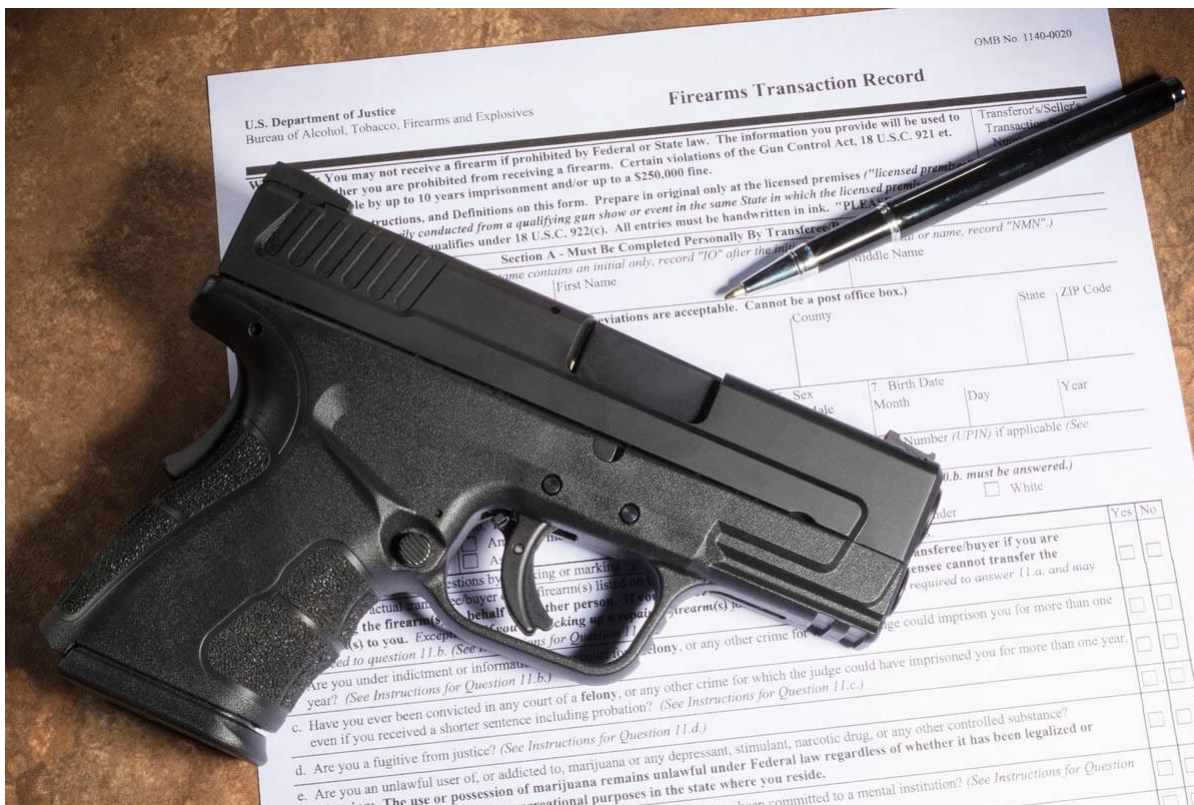
Pros and Cons of Gun Ownership for the Elderly



According to [research](#) published in the *International Criminal Justice Review*, though the chance of being victimized is lower for individuals 65 and older than for other age groups, this portion of the population generally has more fear when it comes to personal safety. This study also revealed that some of this concern is related to where they live and their immediate surroundings, but some also have concerns based on their own unstable health or lower economic resources.

In instances like this, having a gun for protection may help relieve some of these concerns to provide a peace of mind that if someone tries to victimize them, they would be in a better position to protect themselves.

Factors to Consider Before Buying a Gun



What if you're 65 or older, in good physical health, and fully capable of safely using and protecting a firearm? In this case, there are additional factors that can help you decide whether or not gun ownership is the right decision for you.

Your willingness to take a life

Survival Common Sense shares that one of the very first factors any gun owner—regardless of age—should consider is whether they're willing to use it. Specifically, you need to decide whether you're willing to kill another human being if it came down to it. If your answer is no, Survival Common Sense recommends that you not buy a gun because "it will do you no good, and may cause you harm."

If your answer is yes, it's important to think about what happens if you do have to use it. According to U.S. Concealed Carry Association (USCCA), this involves calling 911 and reporting the shooting. Then, the scene will be "scoured" by homicide detectives who will interview anyone who could potentially be a witness.

The next step, and one the USCCA recommends, is speaking with an attorney immediately to "tell your story in painful detail." It's at this point, typically a day or two later, that you may be contacted by the press or notice that people are questioning you on what "really" happened.

If it cannot be completely substantiated that you shot in self-defense, you could be charged with homicide and taken to court. This could mean a long legal battle and, with it, huge costs.

There are also emotional ramifications related to taking someone else's life, even in a self-defense scenario, so these must be considered as well. The Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network shares that these may include:

- Having nightmares or an inability to sleep
- Feeling euphoric or, conversely, experiencing self-doubt
- Feeling depressed or withdrawing socially
- Feeling more aggressive
- Changes in appetite
- Experiencing sexual dysfunction
- Increased substance use and abuse

Knowing all of this ahead of time can help you make a more informed decision as to whether you're willing to pull the trigger if the situation warrants it. Also, it helps you decide if you're willing to deal with the aftermath that could affect you for days, months, or years, if not for the rest of your life.

Your state's gun laws

It's also important to know your state's gun laws so you can be sure that you don't violate them. If you're unsure what those laws are, the NRA-ILA offers an online search by state that will tell you if you need a permit to purchase the gun, if you have to register it, if licensing is required, and if you need a permit to carry it on your person.

In addition to knowing the laws within your own state, it's important to know the laws in states you are traveling to or through. This keeps you on the right side of the law should you decide to take your firearm with you when you travel or if you have a second home in another location.

Your mental health

The government makes an effort to stop individuals who are mentally ill from securing a firearm. The National Conference of State Legislatures reports that, according to U.S. federal law, it is unlawful to sell a firearm or ammunition to a person with a mental defect. Additionally, each state has similar laws on their books, which makes this type of sale a state offense, too.

Proving that this mental defect exists requires one of two scenarios, CNN reports. The first is that the person has been involuntarily committed to a mental health hospital, and the second is if a court or the government has formally declared the person mentally incompetent.

Many firearms experts struggle with these requirements, citing that certain mental health issues, while not necessarily dangerous, could potentially compromise an individual's ability to use a firearm in a safe and effective manner.

For instance, Guns & Ammo magazine shares that schizophrenics are often hard to diagnose and, many times, can control their symptoms just long enough to buy a firearm. But what happens if they eventually return to their delusions and distorted realities?

The mental concern most prominent with the elderly population is that of dementia. The Alzheimer's Disease International reporting that the risk of dementia-type conditions is highest for the elderly, though it can also develop earlier. Additionally, worldwide, someone develops this condition every three seconds.

On May 25, 2018, The New York Times published a piece about how a caregiver found herself face-to-face with a gun while making a visit to a 72-year-old woman who had developed this disease. An interview with a family medicine specialist revealed that this type of issue can be fairly common in cases of mental illness because "the attachment to guns often dies hard for older people."

Depression is another mental health condition that may be a good reason to keep firearms out of the home. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that a majority of suicides—22,963 of the 44,965 suicides committed annually—are committed with firearms, and that men use a gun for this purpose almost twice as often than women (56.6 percent versus 32.1 percent respectively).

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Responsible Ownership Guidelines for Senior Gun Owners



If you're unfamiliar with firearms and don't know basic gun safety rules, taking a gun safety course will help you learn the ins and outs of safe gun ownership.

If, after considering all of these factors, you decide that gun ownership is right for you, it's important to follow responsible gun ownership guidelines at all times. What do these guidelines entail?

Choose the Right Weapon

[Ammo.com](#) says that it's extremely important as a senior gun owner to select the right weapon. This involves choosing a gun you're able to handle "both in manual dexterity and in strength," which means selecting a firearm in which you can easily and smoothly pull the trigger. Also, it must have a recoil you can handle as well.

With all of this in mind, Ammo.com says that semi-automatic pistols can sometimes be difficult for aging individuals because it takes a bit of strength and dexterity to pull back the slide. However, some seniors find revolvers more challenging because of their typically longer and heavier trigger pull.

The key is to try both to see which one feels easiest and most comfortable. Additionally, while a gun larger than a .22 is recommended for self-defense, if this is the caliber of gun you can best handle, it is "better than no gun at all," according to Ammo.com.

Know How to Handle It

After selecting the gun best-suited for your individual needs, the next step is to learn how to handle it in the safest manner possible. If you're unfamiliar with firearms and don't know basic gun safety rules, taking a gun safety course will help you learn the ins and outs of safe gun ownership.

This will also give you the opportunity to ask any questions you may have while getting advice from someone who is an expert in gun ownership. You can also search for local firearms instructors and see what types of courses are available. The NRA offers a variety of gun safety classes too.

If your goal is to carry your gun concealed when you're out of the house or to carry it in your vehicle as you travel around, this type of course may be required depending on your state's individual laws.

Learn When You Can and Can't Use a Gun

In addition to knowing how to handle your gun, you also want to know when you can use it.

Unfortunately, there is not a one-size-fits-all answer to this question when it comes to self-defense because the answer varies based on the state you live in, according to [Concealed Nation](#). To find the laws for your local area, this gun expert recommends that you contact your local NRA chapter, take a deadly force class, or research your state laws online.

However, many jurisdictions have three standards that must be met prior to using a gun for self-defense purposes according to [Concealed Nation](#).

1. The first is that the threat must be imminent. In other words, there was nothing you could do to stop the threat (like run away or otherwise thwart the attack) other than shoot your gun.
2. The second is the standard of a "reasonable man," which basically asks whether a reasonable person in your situation would have shot the gun as well.
3. The third variable that must usually be present in self-defense shootings is that the threat has to be capable of causing death or, at a minimum, major bodily harm. If it isn't, you're typically not legally justified in shooting a gun in self-defense.

Other factors that could potentially impact your legal ability to use a gun for protecting yourself include whether the threat is credible (the assailant can actually engage in a life-threatening action) and whether you're an innocent party to the attack (you didn't provoke it).

If you're buying the gun for other purposes, such as to hunt or shoot targets, there are local laws about these practices as well. Taking the time to inquire about them before even buying a gun can save you a lot of grief while keeping you from being charged and potentially jailed for violating local firearm laws.

Practice Regularly

If you own a gun, you want to become so familiar with it and so comfortable with its use that it feels like second nature. This requires regular practice, not just shooting it once and putting it away. But how often is regularly?

[USA Carry](#) says that your goal should be to get "really good" with your gun, which this organization translates to mean "good enough to defend yourself under all sorts of standards" and having "better than average accuracy at speed." Their recommendation is to handle the gun every day and at a minimum practicing dry fire drills, which involves practicing with a gun that is unloaded, yet treating it as if it is.

As far as practicing with real ammunition, the more often you fire the gun, the more proficient you will become with it. Make going to the range a priority in your life so you stay brushed up on your firearm handling skills.

If you plan to have the gun for self-defense purposes, take the time to practice in real-life scenarios so you get a better feel for the types of situations you could actually encounter and how to best respond. For instance, if you keep the gun in your nightstand, practice accessing it from your bed in the dark. And if you are going to carry it on your body, practice pulling it from the holster so it is a smoother move.

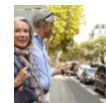
Regardless of how you plan to carry it and when you plan to use it, always keep your finger off the trigger until you're ready to pull it. This will prevent you from inadvertently firing the gun if you become startled or were to inadvertently trip.

Advise Visitors You Have a Gun

Deciding to own a gun also involves making sure it doesn't end up in the hands of someone who is not qualified or legally able to use it. If you plan to have visitors in your home, especially if they are staying overnight, make them aware that you have a gun on the premises so they're not surprised if they see it or you have to use it.

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Safe Storage Guidelines For Elderly Gun Owners



If you have a large number of visitors at your home or if your young grandchildren come around often, you may want to consider storing your guns unloaded to increase the level of safety.

Just as it is important to follow safe gun procedures when carrying or using a firearm, it's also critical to follow safe storage practices. Here are a few to consider.

Storage Location

When considering where you will store your gun, you also don't want the firearm so accessible that it can be found and used by everyone. However, you also want to be able to access it should the need arise.

Some people choose to keep their gun in their nightstand. This provides easy access at night if someone broke into the house while they're asleep. However, if you have a lot of people in and out of your home or you have grandchildren running around, this may not be the best location.

Other options include keeping it in your closet, high up on a shelf, or locked away in a gun safe.

If you decide to use a gun safe, keep in mind any personal limitations you may have in accessing it. For instance, you need more fine motor skills to use a key or enter a combination, whereas a safe with fingerprint access may be easier if this is a concern.

Fine motor skills may be even more of an issue in a life-or-death scenario as [research](#) has found that once your heart rate goes above 115 beats per minute, these skills start to decline.

There is no right or wrong answer here, just be sure to keep your gun where it is accessible to you, yet not accessible to those who shouldn't have it.

Use Locks

Another way to improve gun safety is to use a lock. Some locks are meant to loop through the barrel to keep it from firing and others involve putting a guard over the trigger so it cannot be fired.

The one thing to keep in mind with any type of lock is that most do require a certain steadiness of the hand to remove them. So, again, if you plan to use your gun for self-defense, you'll want to practice removing the lock so you're able to do so quickly and easily.

Storing the Gun Loaded Versus Unloaded

Some people argue that a gun should be stored loaded so it is ready to go if needed, while others say it should be stored unloaded because that is the safest. Who is right?

The answer to this question is one of personal preference and a decision each gun owner should make on his or her own. That being said, if you have a large number of visitors at your home or if your young grandchildren come around often, you may want to consider storing your guns unloaded to increase the level of safety. You may even want to store the ammunition in a separate location entirely so curious kids cannot easily load the gun.


Whatever option you choose, be sure to practice with it. In other words, if you're going to store your gun loaded, practice getting it from wherever you keep it safely. However, if you're going to store your gun unloaded, practice loading it quickly so you know you can get it ready if you need it.

If you decide that having a firearm is the right decision for you, be sure to practice responsible gun ownership and follow safe storage guidelines. This can keep you and your family safer, while also keeping you on the right side of the law.

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