

ELDERCARE

Tips During

COVID-19



Caring for the Elderly- Without Putting Them at Risk

Amid the uncertainty swirling around the coronavirus pandemic stands one undisputed fact: The highest rate of severe, life-threatening symptoms is among older people, particularly those with underlying medical conditions. This includes those over the age of 60, and especially those over 80. This leaves older people and their families wondering what extra precautions they should take.

Familiarize Everyone with Guidelines and Follow Them. Geriatricians recommend their patients adhere to current recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO): Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water for 20 seconds (the time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice) or clean them with alcohol-based hand gel; avoid handshakes; stay away from large gatherings; clean and disinfect objects that are touched frequently; and avoid public transportation and crowds.

What About Nonessential Doctor's Appointments? Some experts are recommending that older and at-risk adults cancel nonessential doctor's appointments, including wellness visits. However, keep in mind that many older adults have concerns that require regular follow-up, such as Dementia, Parkinson's Disease, and Cardiovascular Disease. In these cases, it's best to call your loved one's doctor, and ask for their opinion. Telemedicine is being offered by many physicians, which may help bridge the gap if appropriate. Another question to ask the doctor: How can I get a stockpile of prescriptions (perhaps a 90-day supply) to have on hand?

If your loved one is displaying symptoms, such as fever, cough and shortness of breath, please call a healthcare provider immediately.

Make a Plan. Planning also helps reduce panic and anxiety, so communicate a care plan among family members. There should also be enough supplies [food and medication] in the house that can last for at least two weeks, or maybe more. In many cases, you can mail order the medication and use grocery delivery services, as ways to further protect the older adults in the family.

Have a Talk with Home Health Aides. Many older Americans receive care in their homes, delivered by a home care agency or workforce. This means a steady parade of home health aides entering their home, which requires extreme caution during this time. Have conversations with their caregivers about hygiene. Contact the agency in question and ask about their plan to help minimize problems.

What if my Loved One is in a Nursing Home? Contact the care facility and find out about the precautions they have in place. There is also guidance from the state department of public health. Keep a close eye on what is happening in your community, and depending on your state, follow your Department of Health/Public Health guidance.

Stay Connected. Experts warn that social distancing, which is currently the best solution we have to stop the spread of virus could lead to social isolation, which is already a problem in the older population. Social connections are so important, and this is a time where long-term facilities may be restricting visitors due to the risk of infection. Even for those living independently at home, it is very important that the elderly think twice about having friends and family members visit them. So, how can people stay connected with their elderly family members and friends during a time of restrictions on visits?

- **Employ alternative options.** If your loved one is tech savvy, there's Facetime, Skype or other similar platforms. Physical check-ins can also be replaced by phone or text chains, which may work better for older adults unfamiliar with video chatting.
- **Meals on Wheels.** Chapters have phone reassurance services, which allow volunteers to call homebound or quarantined seniors for check-ins and greetings. If you have kids, decorating cards or writing letters that Meals on Wheels volunteers can take to seniors can also help.
- **Care Packages.** Think outside the box, such as leaving notes in the mailbox. Leave groceries or other essential items on their doorstep. There are delivery services for things like flowers and groceries, just to say I'm thinking of you. Don't forget snail mail. These days we forget how valuable a handwritten card, or a letter sent to your loved one can be.
- **Reach out to neighbors who may not have friends or family to help.**
Ask them what they might need.

Stay Active in Body and Mind. Social distancing may affect routines in ways that can compromise the vitality of older adults. It's important as much as possible to maintain good habits, including getting enough sleep, healthful eating and exercise. Exercise may be beneficial in fighting the effects of coronavirus. It can help boost the body's immune functions and decrease inflammation. A walk around the house or a walk around the block several times a day can make a difference. Even small housework can be great to get the blood flowing. There are also a lot of activities at home that can help keep the mind occupied. Getting lost in a good book (reading or audio books), continuing with indoor hobbies and learning something new. Here are a few ideas:

- **Tap into a new community.** Covia.org has a program called Well Connected that anyone can join for free. Group sessions and classes are on a wide range of topics. Well Connected members can play a game, learn a language, write a poem, go on a virtual tour, meditate, share a gratitude, get support, and most importantly, connect and engage with others every day. All groups are accessible by phone or online. Well Connected is a Community Service of Covia and is free of charge to all participants and available to adults over the age of 60.

Call (877) 797-7299 to enroll or get more information.

- **Virtual field trips.** Virtual field trips allow us to go to interesting places without ever leaving the house, such as a national park.

<https://www.thrillist.com/news/nation/google-earth-virtual-tours-of-us-national-parks>.

Google Arts and Culture Collection can take you on virtual tours of hundreds of museums around the world. <https://artsandculture.google.com/partner?hl=en>

Other helpful resources:

- **National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (N4A).** A national membership network of more than 600 agencies that service aging people. Through the Eldercare Locator on its site, it's easy to connect to your local area agency, which will put you in touch with an organization in your community. <https://www.n4a.org/>
- **Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** <https://www.cdc.gov/>
- **Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)** <https://www.cms.gov/>

Call the Ulliance Employee Assistance Program at 800.448.8326—we can help!