



COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE:

PERSONS HOSPITALIZED DURING COVID-19

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If you have been hospitalized during COVID-19, whether or not you have the virus, in addition to all the physical challenges you are experiencing, you are likely very worried, scared, and confused as information and policies keep changing. One of the most distressing aspects of coping with inpatient hospitalization during this time can be the isolation from others given visitor restrictions, the lack of comfort care services (i.e., therapy dogs, patient family experience, etc.), and having fewer support staff such as nurses and technicians that are normally available to people who are hospitalized. It is difficult to balance the emotional needs and well-being of people who are hospitalized with the physical safety and well-being of loving family, concerned staff, and the hospitalized person.

Fortunately, there are steps you can take to persevere through the challenges you are facing. It may be helpful to remember that you are not alone and there are things you can do to cope with this challenging situation. In this guide we present tips to help manage the fear, anxiety and stress individuals are experiencing if they are hospitalized for any reason during the pandemic. As you review these tips, remember your ability to engage in this advice depends on your current health status (physical ability, level of alertness, etc.). Helpful resources also are included.

Prioritize your Health and Well-Being During Hospitalization

- Put your own physical, mental, and emotional well-being first
- Prepare for your hospitalization as best as possible if you have warning that you will be admitted
 - Make a list of items to bring to the hospital or to have family or friends send you through your medical team:
 - Consider bringing the following
 - Key documents
 - Preferred name
 - Healthcare proxy and their contact information
 - Living will and healthcare power of attorney forms



- Personal hygiene items
 - Extra undergarments, pajamas, and other comfortable clothing
 - Phone, computer, or iPad and charges
 - If you don't have a phone, there should be one in the room
 - Entertainment – books, games, or electronic device that allows you to listen to audiobooks, music, or podcasts; watch movies; play games
 - Notebook to track your thoughts, feelings, experiences, and questions for your healthcare team
 - White board and dry erase marker if there's a chance you may be intubated (have a tube down your throat to help you breathe) and may need help to communicate non-verbally
 - Download apps on your phone or iPad that can help you communicate with your care team - Here are several ideas: <https://hcbsprovider.com/12-apps-that-help-people-with-speech-and-communication/>
- Stay informed about your medical care and status
 - Tell your care team how you learn best (listening, reading, visual representations) and request they teach you this way – this helps give you more control and independence and keeps you more informed
 - Write your questions down related to your health, symptoms, recovery, etc.
 - Review these questions with your provider when you have an in-person or telehealth follow up
 - Ask questions to ensure you have a good understanding of your illness, treatment plan, and the potential complications to be on the lookout for
 - Try to include a loved one virtually in the conversations with your healthcare team so they can also ask questions, provide information, and help you process what you learn
 - Request that someone on your team writes a summary of the day (e.g., new diagnoses, medication changes, progress or setbacks) so you can remember the information and communicate it to your loved ones
 - Stand up for yourself if you feel you aren't receiving all of the information you would like



- Follow your healthcare team's guidance about symptom tracking and management
- Get rest, eat healthy foods, drink plenty of water, and get adequate sleep at night
- Remind yourself that your inability to engage in typical activities (i.e., work related activities, caregiving, etc.) is temporary and your recovery is necessary to return to these activities in the future
- Focus on the small steps you can take to improve your health rather than getting caught in the uncertainty and frustration of not being able to do more
- Keep yourself physically comfortable as much as possible and surround yourself with things that make you smile, such as pictures of family, friends or pets
- Move as much as you feel able to do, without overdoing it
- Prevent disorientation, confusion, and delirium
 - Use the resources around you (e.g., electronic devices, television) to orient yourself to the date, time of day and your current situation
 - Keep lights on during the day and off at night
 - Sleep at night and limit naps
 - Maintain as much of your home routine as possible
 - Stay in touch with family and friends, who can help orient you and keep you connected to reality

Attend to Your Emotional Health

- Remember that the visitor restrictions will make your hospital stay more challenging emotionally
 - Recognize your feelings - you may feel isolated, lonely, afraid, helpless, sad, anxious, angry, or disoriented
 - Acknowledge how normal they are
 - Accept your feelings – unconditional self-acceptance is key
 - Give yourself the grace to process your emotions however you need to and at your own pace
 - Advocate for what you need emotionally not just physically from your health-care team



- Gain some control of your anxiety
 - Engage in deep breathing, if possible, when your thoughts race and at regular points during the day to pause and regroup
 - Listen to mindfulness or meditation apps regularly
 - Remember the physical and emotional pain you are feeling is temporary
 - Notice if you are predicting what is going to happen in the future and try to stick to the facts you know and the present situation
 - Notice if you are constantly thinking of the worst-case scenario regarding your health and write out all the other scenarios that could happen including the best- case scenario
 - Decide whether watching the news is more beneficial or more harmful for you and act accordingly
 - Think of other stressful and challenging situations you have encountered and what helped you get through those situations
 - Use those same skills, even if you must adapt them to being in the hospital
 - Distract yourself by engaging in activities as physically able (e.g., read a book or listen to an audiobook, do a puzzle, play a game online with a family member or friend)
 - Participate in spiritual or religious activities (if this is important to you)
 - Request chaplain services at your hospital if they are available
- Cope the best you can with the limited physical contact
 - Do your best to stay patient during this difficult time
 - Keep in mind, your provider may limit their physical presence in the room with you, but are using other strategies to appropriately manage your care (chart review, telephone or video contact, discussions with your care team etc.)
 - Remember, the people who are allowed in the room to see you will be wearing appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as masks, face shields, and gowns



- Practice compassion
 - Be mindful
 - Be gentle with yourself and others during this stressful time
 - Forgive yourself and others
 - Make peace with your inner critic
 - Be kind to yourself when self-compassion and compassion toward others is hard for you
 - Try your best to be generous toward others (e.g., thank your health care team) – this helps both you and the other person feel better

- Practice gratitude
 - Express gratitude
 - Acknowledge each day what you are grateful for
 - Keep your gratitudes simple
 - Don't force it or beat yourself up if you are having a hard time being grateful
 - Remember, there is no need to minimize your suffering or to pretend you are grateful
 - Know that you deserve as much gratitude for yourself as you give others

- Weigh the emotional toll of your hospitalization with the medical risks of leaving the hospital sooner rather than later and discuss this with your medical team
 - Negotiate your discharge date if needed by communicating the emotional difficulties you're having because of being alone in the hospital and weighing this with the care you still need to receive there

- Let someone on your team know if you feel overwhelmed emotionally or psychologically and ask for either an inpatient psychiatric/psychological consultation or outpatient referrals



Get Support from Others

- Remember, while you likely are physically distant from others while you are in the hospital, *you do not have to be socially distant*
- Ask for what you need from your support system – this will help you feel less anxious and powerless and more in control
 - Let them know how they can support you
- Reach out as much as you can to your family and friends, so you feel less lonely and more connected even with the visitor restrictions
 - Convey you want contact, even though you are not feeling well
 - Give your family and friends the best way(s) and times to connect with you
 - Let them know you appreciate their calls, texts, Facetime/Zoom chats, emails, etc.
 - Use technology to connect with people - video chatting may help you feel as close as possible to seeing your loved ones in person
- Search for neighbors or local support services through the local department of health and local community or religious organizations if you would like to expand your support system while in the hospital
- Reach out to different people for different kinds of support – no one person can provide all the types of support you need
 - Determine who to reach out to for practical help, emotional or moral support, or social chat or virtual play
- Ask your main point person (“healthcare proxy”) to update your family and friends, so you don’t have to use your energy to do so

Helpful Resources

General Information about COVID-19:

- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
- WHO: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- Emory: <https://www.emory.edu/coronavirus/>
- Emory LGS: <https://www.gs.emory.edu/>
- SAMHSA: <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/tips-social-distancing-quarantine-isolation-031620.pdf>



COVID-19 related Anxiety and Psychological Coping:

- Local COVID-19 emotional support lines o Georgia – 866-399-8938
- CDC Coping Resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>
- CDC Dealing with a Traumatic Event: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/index.asp>
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/covid/index.asp>
- General Recommendations: <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-to-cope-with-coronavirus-covid-19-anxiety-psychologist-2020-2>
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Self Help Brochures: <http://counseling-center.illinois.edu/node/376>
- SAMHSA: <https://www.samhsa.gov/coronavirus>
- Psychology Tools: <https://www.psychologytools.com/psychological-resources-for-coronavirus-covid-19/>