



COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE:

IMMUNOCOMPROMISED INDIVIDUALS

Version 2, 4/20/20

The COVID-19 outbreak undoubtedly adds to the fear and anxiety immunocompromised individuals already experience, especially during cold and flu season. Although we do not fully understand how the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 affects high-risk groups, it is well known that people with weakened immune systems are at an increased risk of infections and can have a more severe prolonged course of illness. Therefore, it is important for immunocompromised individuals to take extra precautions to prevent infections.

People may be immunocompromised due to a chronic condition that affects the immune system or because they are taking medications that suppress the immune system (e.g. bone marrow or organ transplant, HIV or AIDS, cancer treatment, and prolonged use of corticosteroids). **Since there is no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 yet, it is essential for immunocompromised individuals to minimize their risk of being exposed to COVID-19.** Here are some tips to help immunocompromised individuals cope with the added stress and maintain their well-being. Helpful resources are also included.

Avoid Close Physical Contact with Individuals that May Be Infected

- Stay at least 6 feet or 2 arms lengths away from people especially those who are sick or who have recently traveled to an area with high COVID-19 activity
- Isolate at home if you are in contact with someone or someone in your household is sick and inform your healthcare provider who will inform you of next steps

Stay Home as Much as Possible

- Follow any shelter-in-place orders in your area and avoid going to crowded spaces where you'll be in close contact with others
- Have enough groceries, household supplies, and prescription medication on-hand so that you can comfortably stay home for a few weeks if needed
 - Consider online ordering and delivery, which could help you avoid having to go out
- Have your prescription medications filled
 - Check to see if your insurance allows for a 90-day supply of prescription medication rather than a 30-day supply during this pandemic
 - Refill your prescriptions in advance each time - do not wait until the day be-



fore to refill

- Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacy about ordering prescription medications online and having them mailed to your home or use a pharmacy drive-thru or ask a caregiver to pick up your medication

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Avoid the Following if You Must Leave Your Home

- Avoid going out for food or medicine during peak hours and keep 6 feet of distance between yourself and others
- Avoid touching your face (i.e. eyes, nose and mouth) because this is how germs get into your body
- Avoid high-traffic surfaces in public places (i.e. elevator buttons, door handles, shopping cart handles)
 - Use your elbow, a tissue, or your sleeve to cover your hand if you must touch these surfaces
- Wear a cloth face covering (not a surgical mask or N-95 respirator) in public, especially in places where it's hard to maintain at least 6 feet of distance between yourself and another person (see [CDC](#) website)

Disinfect, Sanitize, & Wash Your Hands Often

- Wash your hands using soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you've been in a public place
- Clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available
- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces and common areas in your household (i.e., tables, doorknobs, light switches, phone, computer, remote controls, faucet handles, toilets) on a regular basis
- Make sure others in your household or anyone you are regularly in close contact with follow these same precautions

Maintain Healthy Habits to Keep Your Immune System as Strong as Possible

- Keep taking your daily medications and/or vitamins as prescribed
 - Ask your healthcare provider if you can get an advance supply of your medications in case you need to stay home for more than a few weeks given that you are at increased risk
- Do not stop taking your immunosuppressing medications unless your healthcare provider advises you to do so - just as there is risk associated with having a compromised immune system, there is also risk associated with stopping medication



- suddenly and potentially having disease flares
- Talk with your healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns, or if you become sick
 - Make sure you eat a healthy, nutritious, balanced diet
 - Get plenty of sleep (i.e. 6-8 hours per night)!
 - Manage your stress - it's normal to feel uneasy during this uncertain time
 - Remember that although this virus is new, respiratory illnesses are not, and healthcare providers are trained to manage them
 - Stay informed by trusted sources, such as the [CDC](#), but limit your exposure to news coverage and social media
 - Do normal relaxing activities at home like listening to music, reading, talking with friends, etc.
 - Engage in daily physical activity like walking, climbing the stairs, practicing yoga, stretching, and doing work around your home

Stay in Contact with Your Healthcare Team (by Phone or Electronically)

- Call your healthcare provider if you have scheduled medical appointments and you are unsure whether you should keep your appointment, if the appointment is being rescheduled, or if the appointment is being handled via the phone or virtually through telemedicine
- Plan to keep your appointment if you are scheduled for a treatment or exam that cannot be done via telemedicine and that is urgent or emergent - healthcare facilities are taking precautions to protect the health and safety of patients that do need to present to clinics during this time
 - Call your healthcare team if you develop COVID-19 symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, shortness of breath, or diarrhea/nausea) and they will let you know what you should do next - Emory Healthcare COVID-19 Response Line: 404-712-6843
 - Call 911 or go to the emergency room if you develop severe symptoms such as difficulty breathing, dizziness, a severe headache or chest pain

Make a Plan

- Identify who will care for you if you do get sick
- Ask family members, friends, or neighbors to check on you regularly via phone, email, or social media if you live alone



Helpful Resources

COVID-19 and Chronic Medical Conditions:

- American Cancer Society: <https://www.cancer.org/latest-news/common-questions-about-the-new-coronavirus-outbreak.html>
- American Society of Transplantation: <https://www.myast.org/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-frequently-asked-questions-transplant-candidates-and-recipients>
- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/groups-at-higher-risk.html>
- CDC/HIV: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/hiv.html>
- Cleveland Clinic: <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/faqs-what-you-should-know-about-covid-19-and-chronic-medical-conditions/>

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>
- Check Your Risk for COVID-19: <https://c19check.com/start>