



## **COVID-19 PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS GUIDE:**

### **OLDER ADULTS**

**Version 2, 4/20/20**

The COVID-19 outbreak is taking a toll on society universally, and fear and confusion are common in these unprecedented times. If you are an older adult, you know that loneliness may not be an uncommon feeling and may be even more prevalent during this pandemic. You also may be feeling particularly afraid to leave your house for fear of becoming ill or especially stressed. This is understandable given that people 60 years and older are at higher risk for severe illness, with those over 85 at the highest risk. This is because older adults may have a hard time fighting off infection due to immune system changes associated with aging and often underlying health conditions that make illness recovery difficult. You may require medical care or day-to-day assistance. Also, you may be worried about your financial security. Additionally, you may be uncomfortable connecting to family, health providers, or other resources via technology. These stressors can leave you feeling helpless, alone, or frozen. To help you find healthy ways to take care of yourself, use balanced ways to cope, and optimize your well-being, here are some tips for older adults. Helpful resources also are included.

#### **Attend to Your Health**

- Use telehealth or the telephone to confer with your healthcare professionals whenever possible
- Wait for your standard check-up or follow-up appointments for your health conditions if possible
- Tell a loved one, friend, or neighbor if you're concerned about your health
- Stock up on over the counter and prescription medications (90-day prescriptions are now available for most medications and from most doctors)
- Mail order your medications if possible
- Protect yourself from COVID-19 to the extent possible
  - Wash your hands as directed by the CDC
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands, and cover your coughs and sneezes
  - Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces
  - Limit contact with others
  - Avoid crowds
  - Keep a distance of at least six feet between you and others
  - Stay away from everyone possible when you don't feel well



- Watch for symptoms and warnings of COVID-19 and call **your healthcare professional if you have concerns** about being ill related to COVID-19
- Have your healthcare provider's information easily accessible for yourself and share it with others who may need to contact them on your behalf
- Make sure your advanced directive is up to date with your current wishes and shared with your healthcare professionals and your power of attorney

### **Have and Utilize Emergency Contacts**

- Appoint someone as an emergency contact who you can call with concerns or requests for help
- Have visible (in your place of residence, on your phone) emergency contacts who can be contacted by others if you become ill
- Be sure someone has a key to your residence to check on you and help you out
- Have a back up caretaker plan if others become ill that you rely on (if applicable)

### **Be Sure You Have the Supplies and Resources You Need**

- Make sure you have adequate supplies to last 2-4 weeks
- Stock up on basic supplies (e.g., toothpaste, canned goods, nonperishable food)
- Make meals and freeze them
- Go to stores only during hours allotted for older adults
- Order supplies online if able to do so
- Request that a family member, neighbor or friend get you the supplies and resources that you need
- Access local online and grassroots services assisting older adults in purchasing grocery and pharmacy items
- Call in orders for grocery and pharmacy items to newly set up local volunteer groups who take and handle such requests

### **Boost Your Well-Being**

- Adopt a routine that breaks up your day, adds predictability, and includes body movement, regular meals, and socializing. Consider the following, for example:
  - 8 am Cook breakfast
  - 9 am Spiritual or pleasure reading
  - 10 am Light exercise and stretching for 30 min
  - 12 pm Make lunch and eat "virtually" with a friend by phone or video chat
  - 1:30 pm Listen to a radio program



- 2:30 pm Walk outside
- 4 pm Phone calls to check on friends and relatives
- 6 pm Cook dinner
- 8 pm Take a hot bath
- 9 pm Listen to a meditation recording and go to bed
- Do something that makes you smile every day, like cooking a delicious meal even if it is just for yourself
- Do something thoughtful for someone else every day, such as calling younger grandchildren to provide even a few minutes of “virtual babysitting” for their parents
- Use a journal to explore feelings and make meaning
- Use mindfulness meditation tools to stay grounded in the present rather than thinking constantly of the past or future
- Share uplifting, inspiring, or funny messages in writing, pictures, or through social media

### **Gain Comfort with Technology**

- Be compassionate toward yourself that many older adults feel overwhelmed by the ongoing advice to use technology to stay connected and get supports from family, friends, and providers
- Know that you are not alone in feeling helpless, discouraged, confused or lost with these technology demands
- Remember that what feels overwhelming at first will probably get easier with practice
- Try with guidance and support only 1 or 2 new small technology-related things each week
  - Learn how to respond to a Zoom invitation (do not need to learn many elements of Zoom all at once)
- Get help in learning to use new technology
  - Ask for a phone date with a family member or friend for step-by-step guidance and practice using a new platform for socializing
  - Reach out to support staff associated with your healthcare providers for guidance in using technology to interact with your healthcare provider or respond to an invitation from them for an appointment – they are equipped to do so and happy to help you
    - Seek out online tutorials at <http://www.YouTube.com> that give detailed and specific information about each technology and all its components
    - Try searches like, “How to use Facetime”
    - Remember, if you have the question, someone else has asked the question before and so the answer is available



- Ask people to accommodate your level of skill so that you do not need to miss out on social and healthcare connections

### **Cope Effectively with Your Illness Fears**

- Be aware when your illness fear may be taking hold of you and you are obsessing about COVID-19 - for example:
  - Monitoring your body or your loved one for physical symptoms constantly throughout the day
  - Search repeatedly your potential symptoms online
  - Worry about you or your loved ones getting sick when you are trying to sleep or trying to engage in an enjoyable task
  - Talk *only* about the virus with significant others
  - Refuse to leave your house to engage in minimal risk activities such as taking a neighborhood walk or sitting outside in the sunshine
- Recognize when you are so overwhelmed by your fears that you try to tune them out and avoid them completely - For example, you:
  - Zone out by watching TV or surfing the internet for much of the day
  - Fail to answer the phone to reschedule appointments
  - Do not anticipate medical needs like refills of medication
  - Spend time in bed at the expense of engaging in recommended physical activity
  - Go to the opposite extreme by acting as if everything is just as it always was, refusing to physically distance or take any hygienic precautions
- Strive to find the middle ground, so that you cope in a healthy way with your illness fears
  - Identify what it is that is in your control that could reduce the likelihood of illness contraction
  - Talk with your social support network of friends, family, and neighbors to make a plan of action using the CDC guide in the event that you or someone in your household gets sick
  - Limit how much time you spend checking for and talking about COVID-19
  - Redirect your attention to other parts of life that are meaningful to you (e.g., faith, reading, family and friend relationships)
  - Listen to meditation to help you sleep
  - Take time to write out your worries once a day to acknowledge that it is scary to feel so vulnerable
  - Consider reaching out to a mental health provider, whom you can identify by getting a recommendation from a friend, spiritual leader, or online database such as the American Psychological Association or Psychology Today - many therapists are currently offering therapy sessions by video chat



## Cope Effectively with your Financial Concerns

- Be aware when your financial concerns may be taking hold of you and you are obsessing about your finances related to COVID-19 related economic challenges - For example, you:
  - Monitor your financial profile multiple times/day
  - Watch, read, or listen to the financial news continuously
  - Make major financial plans that are inconsistent with your values
- Recognize when are you so overwhelmed by your financial fears that you try to tune them out and avoid them completely - For example, you:
  - Avoid opening and paying bills
  - Avoid working on your taxes
  - Make impulsive purchases that feel good in the short-term but only add to the financial stress
- Strive to find the middle ground so you cope in healthy ways with your financial concerns
  - Talk to someone you trust, professional or personal, who understands finances
    - Discuss with them your goals and your fears
    - Remember, elder law attorneys specialize in planning for the needs of older Americans
  - Seek financial updates at specific times during the day, once or twice
  - Set one dedicated time each day to address your financial questions and to take care of any to-dos like bills or tax preparation
  - Remove stored credit card information from websites to slow down impulsive purchases
  - Consider reaching out to United Way's 211 or your Area Agency on Aging to talk to a specialist about local resources for food, housing, in-home care, or caregiver support
  - Turn to Atlanta Legal Aid's Senior Legal Hotline (1-888-257-9519) for free legal help for older people experiencing economic or social issues around receiving benefits, landlord/tenant issues, and more
- 

### Helpful Resources

- Videos can be found at the UC San Diego resource library, UCLA library and apps including Calm, Headspace, Virgin Pulse, Whil, The ACT Companion, UCLA Mindful App
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention's "COVID-19: What Older Adults Need to Know"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjcoN9Aek24&feature=youtu.be&delivery-Name=DM22660>



- [The Wall Street Journal published an article by Jargon, March 31, 2020, about what people are doing to help homebound seniors - https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-people-are-doing-to-help-homebound-seniors-and-how-you-can-too-11585647001?mod=tech\\_lead\\_pos5](https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-people-are-doing-to-help-homebound-seniors-and-how-you-can-too-11585647001?mod=tech_lead_pos5)
- The Institute on Aging's Friendship Line (1-800-971-0016) is an accredited crisis line for people ages 60 and over and adults with disabilities. They also provide warm, supportive conversation for older adults who may be experiencing depression or isolation.  
<https://www.ioaging.org/services/all-inclusive-health-care/friendship-line/>
- The Institute on Aging has compiled resources and thoughtful reading for caregivers who want to help their loved ones become more comfortable with and take advantage of technology. <https://www.ioaging.org/the-2018-guide-to-best-technology-resources-and-tools-for-seniors#resources-for-socialization-and-support>
- Area Agencies on Aging connect callers with resources and services for older persons and people with disabilities throughout Georgia.  
<https://aging.georgia.gov/locations>
- The Alzheimer's Association is an excellent resource for caregivers who may be concerned about staying healthy when caring for a loved one with dementia  
[https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/coronavirus-\(covid-19\)-tips-for-dementia-care](https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/coronavirus-(covid-19)-tips-for-dementia-care)
- You can find a local attorney specially trained in the legal and financial planning needs of older adults and persons with disabilities at the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys or the Life Care Planning Law Firms Association,

<https://www.naela.org/>, <https://www.lcplfa.org/>