**Coronavirus and COVID-19: Caregiving for the Elderly**

When it comes to COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus, older people are especially vulnerable to severe illness. Research is showing that adults 60 and older, especially those with preexisting medical conditions, especially heart disease, lung disease, diabetes or cancer are more likely to have severe coronavirus infection than other age groups.

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# **Keep yourself well**

First and most important, as a caretaker you should take all the precautions you can to avoid becoming infected yourself. Here are the basics:

Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after providing care, preparing food, using the bathroom, or touching surfaces in public places.

Avoid crowds; if you cough/ sneeze, do so into the bend of your elbow or into a disposable tissue. Keep your hands away from your face.

Clean frequently touched surfaces in your home often, including mobility and medical equipment used by your loved one, such as walkers, canes and handrails.

# **Practice social and physical distancing but not social isolation**

One important way to lower the risk of your older family members catching COVID-19 is to limit in-person visits. But this may be tough for older adults who cherish time spent with friends and family members.

Social distancing doesn’t have to mean isolation or loneliness. We need to keep older adults safe, but also keep in mind that social isolation can have a negative impact on older people’s immunity and mental health.

With many houses of worship closing their doors until the pandemic eases, congregants, especially older ones, may feel cut off. Faith communities are often a big part of older adults’ social lives. Caregivers might help their loved one access online services and outreach for spiritual solace and support.”

# **Technology for Staying Connected**

To help older adults feel involved, purposeful and less lonely during the pandemic:

Show them how to video chat with others using smartphones, laptops or tablets. Use apps on these devices to provide captions for adults with hearing challenges.

Encourage friends and family outside of your household to telephone, write notes or send cards to lift your loved one’s spirits.

# **Keep elders involved**

Give homebound older adults a project they can work on. Think about going through and organizing old photos and memorabilia together, and enjoy the stories and happy memories they inspire. It can be a good time for an elder to demonstrate cooking a favorite family recipe or share favorite songs or movies with other people in the household.

# **Minimize the risk of COVID-19 infection**



If an older adult in your care is feeling well, consider helping them postpone elective procedures, annual checkups and other non-essential doctor visits.

Keep in mind that many older people, especially those living with chronic illness, have important relationships with their [caregivers. To help them stay in touch, ask their doctors’ offices if they offer telemedicine which](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/telemedicine/) enables doctors and patients to communicate over video, email or other means rather than face-to-face.

Older adults should put off non-essential travel, particularly cruises or trips with itineraries that would expose them to crowds.

# **Decide on a plan**

If you can, involve your older family member in discussions of how you’ll manage interruptions of routines and what will happen if they (or someone else in your family) becomes sick. Talking things through ahead of time as a family can reduce stress and help everyone feel more involved and prepared.

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If you’re the main caregiver, designate someone nearby whom you could rely on to care for your elderly family member if you yourself become ill.

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Gather one to three months of medications, and at least two weeks’ worth of food, over-the-counter remedies, pet supplies, and other essentials. Find out which delivery services are available in your area.

[https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-caregiving-for-the-elderly](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-caregiving-for-the-elderly)