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Unterrified Democrat

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Senior Living



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Why seniors are at greater risk for COVID-19

It has been more than a year since the world learned about the novel coronavirus COVID-19. Since December 2019, there have been tens of millions of reported cases and nearly two million deaths worldwide attributed to COVID-19, according to data from the Johns Hopkins University Center for Systems Science and Engineering.

Experts are still unclear how prevalent the virus really is because a large number of cases are not reported due to mild or asymptomatic infections. But there's no denying COVID-19 can be very risky for one large segment of the population.

The chances for severe illness from COVID-19 increases with age, with older adults at the greatest risk, offers the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC further indicates that eight out of 10 COVID-19 deaths reported in the United States have been in adults who are 65 and older. Compared to younger adults, older individuals are more likely to require hospitalization if they contract the illness. People between the ages of 75 and 84 are at eight-

times more likely to be hospitalized and 220 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than the youngest patients.

There are some key reasons why older adults are at higher risk. Vineet Menachery, an immunologist at the University of Texas Medical Branch who studies coronaviruses and their effects on aging immune systems, older adults are more likely to suffer from underlying conditions that can hinder the body's ability to recover from illness. In addition, a greater propensity for inflammation in the body and changes in the way the immune system responds with age are other mechanisms that increase seniors' risk for COVID-19. Furthermore, COVID-19 affects the part of the lungs that delivers oxygen to the bloodstream and removes carbon dioxide. As a person gets older, the lungs are not as elastic and this can affect gas exchange and other functions. Being older coupled with having cardiovascular disease, asthma and diabetes also can raise the threat level of COVID-19.

Seniors must be extra diligent to engage in behaviors that reduce their

risks. Epidemiologists recommend the following:

- Wash or sanitize hands whenever possible, especially upon entering and leaving public buildings.

- Shop and travel during off-peak hours, such as early in the morning, to avoid crowds.

- Use contactless payment methods rather than handling money.

- Ask friends and family to do your shopping and run errands for you.

- Wear masks over the nose and mouth and stay at least six feet away from others.

- If the COVID-19 vaccine is available to you, ask your doctor more about it and get vaccinated

if it's safe to do so.

Learn more about at-risk groups at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html.



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Exercise ideas for people with mobility issues

Physical activity is vital to overall health. The World Health Organization says limiting time spent being idle and taking advantage of opportunities to get moving — even if it’s just a little bit of exercise — can go a long way toward improving overall health.

In November 2020, the WHO released new exercise guidelines for people of all ages. Adults should get between 150 and 300 minutes a week of moderate to vigorous aerobic activity, and that includes older adults and those with chronic conditions or disabilities.

Individuals with limited mobility due to age or preexisting medical conditions may wonder how they can meet the guidelines for exercise. Those with chronic pain or illness sometimes find that exercising for more than a few minutes can be challenging. Even brief periods of exercise can pay dividends, and there are various approaches people can take to work around mobility and other issues.

EXPLORE CHAIR EXERCISES

Just because you are seated doesn’t mean you can’t get a workout in. Seated chair exercises can work various muscle groups. Seated arm rows, tummy twists, overhead arm raises, hand squeezes with a tennis ball, inner thigh squeezes, leg lifts and extensions, and many other exercises can be customized to be performed in a chair.

WORK OUT IN THE WATER

Exercising in the water can assist with movement and reduce strain on the body. The Arthritis Foundation says the water’s buoyancy supports body weight, which minimizes stress on joints and can alleviate pain. Water provides gentle resistance as well — up to 12 times the resistance of air. That means it’s possible to build strength and muscle even just walking or swimming around a pool.

USE RESISTANCE BANDS

Resistance bands are like giant rubber bands that can be used to build up strength and flexibility. Resistance bands are effective, low-cost gear that can offer high-impact results for building muscle, staying fit and increasing mobility. Resistance bands can be used in lieu of hand weights for many exercises and be ideal for those who find barbells and dumbbells are challenging to maneuver.

MIND-BODY EXERCISES ARE AN OPTION

Elder Gym®, a fitness from home service for seniors, suggests exercises like Tai Chi and yoga for those with limited mobility. These exercises integrate awareness of body movement with the exercise through coordinated breathing. The exercises encourage people to focus on slow, fluid movements and deep stretching.

Seniors and others with limited mobility are advised to first discuss fitness regimens with a physician to get a green light to proceed. Then exercise regimens can be started gradually and altered to become more vigorous as the body acclimates to exercise. Increase duration and frequency as strength and endurance builds.



How seniors can approach exercise

Exercise is a vital component of a healthy lifestyle. By making exercise part of their day-to-day routines, people of all ages, including men and women over the age of 65, can greatly improve their overall health.

The American Academy of Family Physicians notes that seniors should aspire to be as active as possible. Exercise is a great way to incorporate physical activity into your daily routine and has been linked to reduced risk for diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis. Though adults with chronic illnesses may be hesitant to exercise, the AAFP notes that it’s possible for men and women who have been diagnosed with such conditions to exercise safely. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that regular physical activity is one of the most important things seniors can do for their health and can potentially prevent many health problems associated with aging.

FREQUENCY OF EXERCISE

Seniors, particularly those who have not exercised much in the past, may not know how much exercise they need to reap the full rewards of physical activity. Though it’s best to discuss exercise with a physician prior to beginning a new regimen, various public health agencies advise seniors to get at least 2.5 hours of moderate aerobic exercise each week. Brisk walking is one example of moderate aerobic exercise. Seniors who want to sweat a little more when exercising can

replace moderate aerobic exercise with one hour and 15 minutes of vigorous exercise, such as jogging, each week.

IS STRENGTH TRAINING SAFE FOR SENIORS?

The CDC advises seniors to incorporate muscle-strengthening activities into their weekly fitness routines twice per week. Lifting weights, working with resistance bands, heavy gardening, and even some forms of yoga qualify as muscle-strengthening activities. Exercises that use your body weight for resistance, such as sit-ups and push-ups, also can help build strength. Always speak with a physician before beginning a muscle-strengthening exercise regimen and, if possible, work with a personal trainer, especially if you’re a novice.

When to stop a workout

It’s imperative that seniors recognize when to stop working out. Exercising more than is recommended by your doctor can increase the risk of illness or injury. In addition, stop exercising if any of the following symptoms appear:

- Dizziness or shortness of breath
- Chest pain or pressure
- Swollen joints
- Nausea
- Tightness in muscles or joints
- Pain anywhere in the body
- Throbbing or burning sensations

Exercise can help seniors stay healthy and feel more energetic throughout the day. Before beginning a new regimen, seniors should discuss physical activity with their physicians.

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How to stay connected with loved ones after moving into an assisted living facility

Decisions surrounding assisted living facilities are not always easy. Men and women may be reluctant to leave their homes while family members may be worried about how their aging loved ones will adjust to life in an assisted living facility. Though modern assisted living facilities cater to residents with an array of needs and interests, the hesitation about whether or not to move into such a facility is understandable.

One of the concerns seniors and their families may have about assisted living facilities is how to remain in touch with loved ones. Thankfully, staying connected is easier than ever before. That ease of connection has been on full display throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, during which aging men and women have been urged to limit contact with people outside their households in an effort to reduce their risk of contracting the virus. When the pandemic is in the rearview mirror, seniors can continue to employ various strategies to stay connected with their families after moving into an assisted living facility.

- **Embrace technology.** It's understandable that seniors are sometimes hesitant to utilize technology. Having spent much of their lives without smartphones and Zoom calls, it may seem like adjusting to a world where such things are now widely utilized will be incredibly difficult. However, modern technology is user-friendly, meaning seniors won't need much, if any, technical expertise or experience to utilize an assortment of devices that can help them stay in touch. Ask a relative to show you the ropes of a new device or request that staff at the facility teach residents the basics of using devices to stay connected with family. Staff may help set up Zoom calls or help residents learn the ropes of texting.

- **Make a weekly communication commitment.** Work with family members to set up a time each week when you can communicate directly with them. If family lives nearby, this might take the form of a weekly family meal at a loved one's home. If family lives too far away for routine in-person meals, set up a time each week for a family Zoom call.

- **Continue to engage with your interests and fellow hobbyists.** If you were an avid reader who loved to discuss and recommend books to your loved ones, then continue to do so after moving into an assisted living facility. Sports fans who bonded with their loved ones over a shared passion for a favorite team can keep following their team and discussing the latest big game with their friends and family via email, texts or video calls. Various studies have discovered the positive effects that hobbies can have on long-term physical and mental health. Staying engaged with your passions can keep lines of communication open with friends and family and benefit your overall health.

Keeping the lines of communication with loved ones open can help aging men and women as they transition to life in assisted living facilities.



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Babysitting for grandparents

Witnessing your children getting older and starting their own lives and families can be bittersweet. There is pride that comes with seeing their successes, but the melancholy of knowing that the years have passed so quickly. Although you may no longer be tucking your children into bed, reading them bedtime stories or bandaging “boo-boos,” when your children have children, the chance to nurture can start anew.

One of the great joys that comes from having older children is the ability to welcome and love grandchildren. Grandchildren are points of light in people’s lives and provide the exuberance and excitement that reminds you of your own youth. Grandparents often are thrilled to be involved in the care and upbringing of their grandkids. Some may also live with their grandchildren to help take some pressures off of adult children.

Babysitting is one way that grandparents can be a frequent fixture in their grandkids’ lives. If it’s been some time since you cared for little children, it’s well worth it to take a refresher course in child care.

MAKE SURE IT’S SAFE

Conduct a safety audit of your home if grandchildren will be coming over to your place. Are outlets secured with covers? Are medications you may be taking out of reach? Do you have gates to block stairs or restrict access to certain rooms? Modifications may be needed.

ASSESS YOUR HEALTH

Chasing after children can be a workout. Be sure you are up for the challenge and have the stamina. If you have any medical conditions that can impair judgement or reaction time, you might want to reconsider babysitting.

TAKE DIRECTIONS

The way you parented may not be the same way your own children parent. Be humble and follow their lead with regard to instructions. The parenting guide Apt Parenting advises that you should ask about the



eating and sleeping habits of the child. You may have to defer to your own children’s guidelines on discipline and behavior.

LEARN WHAT’S NEW

Many things regarding childcare have changed in the last 20 years, including safety laws and guidelines. Be sure you are up to date on these changes. And if you aren’t certain about something, ask. This involves everything from crib bar widths to car seat installation.

Babysitting can be a joyous task for grandparents who are ready for the job.

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Amazing benefits to seniors having pets

Pets bring much joy to the lives they touch. So it should come as no surprise that the 2019-2020 National Pet Owners Survey, which was conducted by the American Pet Products Association, found that about 85 million families in the United States own a pet. In Canada, 7.5 million households are home to companion animals, states the PetBacker blog.

Pets offer companionship and unconditional love. While they are fitting for any family, seniors may find that having a pet is especially beneficial. The organization A Place for Mom, which helps match families with senior living residences, says pets provide a comfort system that produces measurable health results. Caring for pets and being around them can produce a chemical chain reaction in the brain that may help to lower stress hormones while also increasing production of the feel-good hormone serotonin.

This is not the only health benefit pets may provide. A recent study from the Mayo Clinic, which looked at 1,800 people between the ages of 25 and 64 who had healthy hearts, found that almost half owned a dog. Having a dog was likely to spur heart-healthy behaviors, like exercising with the pet, eating well and having ideal blood sugar levels.

Pets also provide emotional support and companionship that can help seniors — including those who may be divorced or widowed — feel more secure and happy. The National Poll on Healthy Aging found that, among

respondents who had pets, 88 percent said their pets helped them enjoy life, and 86 percent said their pets made them feel loved.

Seniors considering getting a pet can explore the many benefits to doing so.

- **Reduce pain:** A 2012 study published in Pain Magazine found therapy dogs provided “significant reduction in pain and emotional distress for chronic pain patients.”

- **Feeling of purpose:** Caring for an animal not only stimulates physical activity, but it also can give seniors a reason to get up and go, which equates to a feeling of purpose.

- **Altered focus:** Having a pet can help seniors focus on something other than physical or mental health issues and preoccupations about loss or aging, according to New York-based psychologist Penny B. Donnenfeld.

- **Increased physical activity:** Pets require care, and that interaction can get seniors moving more than if they didn't have a pet.

- **Improved health:** Ongoing research from Harvard Medical School has found dog owners have lower blood pressure, healthier cholesterol levels and lower risk of heart disease than those who don't own a dog.

- **Stick to routine:** Caring for pets helps seniors maintain a routine. Having structure after retirement can be important to ward off risk of depression. Staying on top of feeding, grooming and other pet needs also can help prevent cognitive decline.

Pets bring many benefits to their owners' lives, and they may be the perfect remedy for seniors looking for a friend and purpose.

How to give back to seniors in your community

The strongest communities tend to be those in which members make a concerted effort to give as much as they get. Giving back to one's community can foster strong relationships with fellow residents and ensure that everyone, including the less fortunate, is in position to live happy, healthy lives.

Certain people in a community may be more vulnerable to issues that can adversely affect quality of life than others. For example, the National Institute on Aging notes that, as men and women age, many are alone more often than when they were younger, leaving them vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness. Such feelings can prove very harmful to their health, potentially contributing to problems such as depression, cognitive decline and heart disease.

Volunteering to help the aging members of one's community is a great way to give back, and such efforts can prove rewarding for both seniors and the volunteers who lend them a hand.

- **Pull an extra chair up to the dinner table.** Many a meaningful connection has been made and maintained over the dinner table. Breaking bread with a senior from your community is a great way to foster such connections and provide an avenue for social interaction for seniors. Seniors who live alone might not enjoy cooking for one each night, but they might jump at the chance to eat dinner with a neighbor and even help prepare the meal. Invite a senior over once per week, encouraging them to share stories about their lives as well as how the community has developed over the years.

- **Help seniors manage their finances.** Many seniors struggle to manage their finances, as laws regarding taxes and investing are subject to routine changes. A little help in this area can go a long way for seniors. Adults who want to help but don't know where to begin can do the legwork for their aging neighbors. Contact agencies such as AARP to determine if there are any financial assistance programs that can help seniors effectively manage their money and take advantage of age-specific perks, such as programs that may help seniors lower their energy costs.

- **Offer to help around the house.** Seniors who reside in single-family homes may not be able to keep up with routine home maintenance. Neighbors who want to help can offer to mow the lawn, tend to the landscaping and tidy up inside. Keep an eye open for other issues, such as clogged gutters, that can be fixed easily but prove costly if they go ignored.

Helping aging neighbors is a great way to give back and build strong communities.



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Tips for dementia caregivers during the pandemic

Caregivers play vital roles in the lives of the people they look after. That's especially true for people caring for dementia patients, many of whom require round-the-clock help every day.

A caregiver's role is never easy, but the demands have been even greater during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Despite social distancing guidelines and recommendations to reduce interactions with those vulnerable to



COVID-19, including the elderly, dementia caregivers must continue to help patients in need.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that older adults are at the highest risk of severe illness from COVID-19. That puts dementia caregivers in difficult positions, as data from the World Health Organization indicates that age is the strongest known risk factor for dementia. The Alzheimer's Association urges dementia caregivers to follow guidelines established by the CDC as they continue to provide care for dementia patients.

- Wear face masks or cloth coverings. Face masks or cloth coverings should be worn when tending to dementia patients. This includes when preparing meals for dementia patients or cleaning their homes. The CDC urges caregivers to wear personal protective equipment when providing personal or medical services to people with dementia, including when helping them bathe.

- Arrange for a substitute caregiver if you are ill or exhibiting any symptoms of COVID-19. Caregivers should have a backup caregiver lined up in case they feel ill or if they are exhibiting any symptoms of COVID-19 or if they have been exposed to anyone with the virus. The CDC notes that symptoms of COVID-19 include fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, and muscle or body aches. A full list of COVID-19 symptoms can be found at www.cdc.gov.

- Wash your hands frequently. Frequent handwashing can help dementia caregivers keep their patients safe. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds upon arriving at your patient's home, and continue to wash your hands frequently throughout the day. If visitors arrive, insist they follow the same handwashing routine. If you cough or sneeze during the day, wash your hands immediately, and always wash hands before preparing meals.

- Look for virtual programs that encourage social engagement. Virtual gatherings have become the new normal as people try to maintain connections with family and friends while respecting social distancing guidelines. The Alzheimer's Association urges dementia caregivers to consider programs that offer virtual activities that encourage dementia patients to engage socially. Such engagement can lift patients' spirits and remaining socially active supports brain health.

Caring for dementia patients during the COVID-19 outbreak requires embracing various strategies to reduce patients' risk of exposure to the potentially deadly virus.

Choices for long-term care

Being able to care for oneself independently can be a source of pride. However, illness or age can affect people in ways that require them to seek assistance with medical needs or daily activities for an extended period of time. In such instances, long-term care services can fill a need.

Long-term care assists people in their homes, in the community or in various types of facilities with various daily and medical requirements. According to WebMD, research shows that many people are unaware of long-term care options or may be misinformed about what's out there.

HOME CARE

Various services can be utilized in the comfort of home. According to the Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee Office on Aging, services can include home-delivered meals, pest control, minor home modifications, or visiting nurses and health aides. Other benefits may include shopping or physical therapy.

COMMUNITY CARE

Community services can include adult day care centers, meal programs, senior centers, community transportation, and others. Community services enable people to continue to live in the community with some support. They also may help family or friends serving as caregivers enjoy a break from the assistance they have been providing.

CARE FACILITIES

Long-term care may be mistaken as strictly nursing homes, but facilities extend to places that provide other services. Here's a look at the care facilities.

- Independent senior living: Independent living facilities may provide assistance only when needed. Amenities are designed to make things easier and more convenient for residents. Fitness centers, pools, dining venues, and transportation may be included. These facilities tend to provide the most independent form of senior living. Some independent living facilities are part of larger continuing care retirement communities that have staged care that goes from independent to skilled nursing.

- Assisted living: These homes provide 24-hour supervision, meals, healthcare services, and other forms of assistance in a home-like setting. Types of services include laundry, housekeeping, medication dispersal, and dressing.

- Skilled nursing homes: Nursing homes provide care for those who cannot care for themselves at home or in the community. These facilities offer many services all under one roof, like rehabilitative services, meals, activities, and around-the-clock care. Some skilled nursing homes offer temporary care after an injury or illness and are used in lieu of an extended hospital stay.

It is never too early to begin planning for elder care that may include long-term care possibilities. Individuals are urged to work with an elder care lawyer to help navigate the complexities of planning for medical care and their potential financial needs.

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Safety first before mixing drugs

Billions of people across the globe take medications each day. Certain medications can help people with potentially debilitating or even deadly conditions live normal lives, while others can help people overcome relatively minor issues like muscle aches or seasonal allergies.

The American Heart Association notes that mixing drugs can produce unexpected side effects. This can make it dangerous for people already on prescription medications to use over-the-counter drugs for issues like headache or seasonal allergies. Understanding the potential interactions between their prescriptions and common prescription and over-the-counter medications can help people stay safe.

- **Antihistamines:** Antihistamines are widely used to alleviate symptoms of the common cold or seasonal allergies, such as runny nose, itchy eyes and sneezing. The AHA notes that, when taken along with blood pressure medication, antihistamines can contribute to an accelerated heart rate and cause blood pressure to spike. The AHA also cautions people taking sedatives, tranquilizers or prescriptions to treat high blood pressure or depression to consult their physicians before taking antihistamines.

- **Bronchodilators:** Bronchodilators relax and open the airways in the lungs and are used to treat various lung conditions, such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD. These drugs make it easier to breathe and are available via prescriptions. But patients with heart disease, high blood pressure, thyroid disease, and/or diabetes should discuss the potential interactions between bronchodilators and other

medications they may be taking with their physicians.

- **Cordarone:** According to Drugs.com, Cordarone is used to treat potentially deadly abnormal heartbeats. Cordarone can cause severe problems that affect the lungs, thyroid or liver, and can be dangerous when combined with other drugs. For example, the AHA notes that patients who take more than 20 milligrams of Zocor, a drug used to lower “bad” cholesterol and potentially to lower the risk of stroke, heart attack and other conditions, while also taking Cordarone are at risk of developing rhabdomyolysis. Rhabdomyolysis is a condition marked by the breakdown of muscle tissue that can lead to kidney failure or death. The AHA also says that Cordarone can inhibit or reduce the effects of the blood thinner Coumadin.

- **Nicotine replacement products:** People taking prescriptions for depression or asthma should consult their physicians before taking any nicotine replacement products. The Federal Drug Administration notes that doctors may want to change dosages of patients’ current medications before recommending they take any nicotine replacement products. The FDA also advises people to speak with their physicians before trying these products if they have diabetes, heart disease, asthma or stomach ulcers; have had a recent heart attack; have high blood pressure but do not take any medication for it; or have a history of irregular heartbeat.

Drug interactions can complicate treatment of various conditions. People currently on medication are urged to speak with their physicians before taking any new medicines, including over-the-counter drugs.



COVID19 is not only negatively affecting our seniors physically, but it has taken a major mental toll as well. Many seniors have been isolated, whether in their homes or at a residential/long term living facility. Elderly have a higher risk of living alone contributing to their chance of facing depression, anxiety, and desolation.

Social isolation and loneliness are not the same thing. Isolation is having minimal social contact, while loneliness is the subjective feeling of being lonely; you can be alone without feeling lonely. Both isolation and loneliness can be associated with increases in certain medical conditions and can even impact mortality.

Here are some tips during these difficult times:

- Don't be afraid to admit you are lonely or need help
- Reach out to local churches – many have organizations designed to help those in need within their community
- Reach out to local schools – classes will gleefully make cards to be sent out to certain individuals or facilities when asked
- Pick up the phone and call someone you haven't spoken with in a while
- Schedule video calls if/when possible
- Take the opportunity to go for a drive if/when possible
- Go for a walk!! Exercise is SO important for mental health!!

We have spoken with many people in our community during the past year dealing with the pandemic. We have been pleased to hear that neighbors are reaching out to neighbors, their older family members, and even helping bring food to those who have been in quarantine. Please, take time each day to think of your neighbors, family, and people you may have missed seeing at church and reach out to them. It will have a positive impact on their mental and physical health, and yours too!

Did you know?

Health screenings are a vital component of preventative health care. Specific screenings for older adults can help them stay healthy. Healthline and WebMD recommend older adults schedule these routine tests. The frequency of the screenings may depend on individuals' health histories, so each test should be discussed with a physician during adults' annual checkups.

- Blood pressure check
- Blood test to check cholesterol and triglyceride levels
- Colorectal cancer exam starting at age 50
- Weight screening to check for gains or losses
- Prostate cancer screening for men age 70 and older
- Breast exam and mammogram for women, starting at age 40
- Pap smear and HPV tests at the recommended intervals advised by a doctor
- Hearing test
- Osteoporosis test
- Shingles and pneumococcal vaccines
- Eye exam
- Periodontal exam once per year

For more information, please contact the

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at 573-897-3103 or

email at osagecountyhealthdepartment@gmail.com