



HOW OLDER ADULTS CAN PROTECT THEIR MENTAL WELLNESS DURING COVID-19

No one is immune to the psychological toll of COVID-19-related restrictions. For older adults, however, the heightened fear of contracting the virus, a sudden decrease in connectivity, or the loss of outside support can make their situation more difficult.

To help self-isolating seniors who are at home during the pandemic, the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) asked Dr. Keri-Leigh Cassidy, professor of psychiatry at Dalhousie University and founder of the Fountain of Health optimal aging initiative, to share some practical advice on how to deal with the challenges of COVID-19.

1 Focus on what you can control

Turn your attention to the things you have control over, such as self-care. To help stay on track, try structuring your day by writing a checklist with things like physical activity, nutritious meals, and meaningful hobbies. Checking off each item as you complete it will help you feel productive and boost your mood. Focusing on areas within your control can also reduce stress and improve long-term resilience. To learn more about self-care and other helpful resources, visit [Fountain of Health](#).

2 Get creative about connecting

Social connection looks different these days, but it's as important as ever for bolstering mental wellness. While phone calls are a great way to stay in touch with friends and family, they aren't the only way to connect from a distance. Consider exchanging letters, going for a (safely spaced) walk together, or doing a drive-by visit to catch up with loved ones. You can also explore video-chat options or virtual book clubs to stay in touch.

3 Be open to technology

Unfamiliar technology can be intimidating, but it's never too late to learn something new. In addition to communication, technology can be used for entertainment, learning, and accessing helpful resources. Examples include:

- The [Wellness App](#), an evidence-based tool for setting and tracking health goals
- The [MHCC Resource Hub](#), mental health information and resources related to COVID-19
- [Skillshare](#), free video tutorials on a variety of subjects
- [Headspace](#), a mindfulness app offering free content during the pandemic

4 Limit your exposure to the news

While it's natural to want to stay informed during a crisis, too much news can increase stress and make it more difficult to focus on what you have control over. Try to limit your news intake to 30 minutes per day and avoid consuming it close to bedtime. When you do seek out the news, choose sources with care and be wary of low-value imagery and sensationalistic language.

For additional guidance, see the MHCC's [media consumption tips](#).

5 Self-monitor your mental wellness

With so much change and uncertainty, feeling some negative emotions is perfectly normal. But it's important to monitor your emotional state and be mindful of any negative patterns or impaired functioning that lasts more than a few consecutive days. A decrease in your appetite, weight, level of interest, energy, and concentration, or having feelings of hopelessness and suicide, are all signs of depression that require treatment. If you're concerned about your mental health, don't hesitate to speak to your family doctor or a mental health care professional.

6 Ask for practical help

There is no shame in asking for help of any kind. Besides the practical benefits, seeking support can reduce stress and improve your mood. The 211 system is a great way to learn about provincial resources and services that are available. Calling specific health and social service agencies can also be useful. If you have friends and family who can help with things like delivering groceries, don't hesitate to ask.

7 Channel past resilience

Some older adults can manage the stress related to COVID-19 better than younger adults. Their life experience enhances the ability to put difficult times into perspective. Consider how you overcame past challenges and trust in the resilience you've developed as a result. Given that the pandemic is just another storm, the fortitude you've built over a lifetime may help you weather it.



For more information, visit www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/covid19



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