According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions are at higher risk for developing more severe complications from the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Learn how you can be an effective caregiver while also taking care of yourself during the COVID-19 pandemic. Always follow guidelines from the CDC, and consider the following tips:

**What You Can Do**

- **Use healthy practices.** As a caregiver you should take all the precautions you can to avoid becoming infected yourself. Ensure that your loved one is also taking precautions. Here are the basics:
  - Clean your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (the time it takes you to sing "Happy Birthday" twice). Soap and water are always preferable, but if they are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
  - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or do so into your elbow. Throw away used tissues in a lined trash can. Immediately wash your hands.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
  - Clean and disinfect household surfaces daily and ‘high touch’ surfaces frequently throughout the day. High touch surfaces include: tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, and include mobility and medical equipment, such as walkers, wheelchairs, canes and handrails. Learn more about cleaning and disinfecting from the CDC.

- **Create a caring support team** made up of several trusted individuals that can help you perform some key caregiving tasks. Assign them practical things that they can do to help, for example, phoning your loved one regularly, helping with errands, getting groceries, doing online shopping, and setting up telemedicine services for your loved one (i.e., medical appointments over the phone or by video). Find out about trusted services that may be available in your community, such as local nonprofits offering food delivery, and houses of worship offering online religious services. Call 211 for community resources in your area or visit the 211 Call Center Search website. For additional local resources, see auntbertha.com. Find your local food bank at feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank.

- **Plan for what you will do if you or your loved one gets sick.** Have a care plan in place for yourself and help your loved one develop a care plan, too. A care plan summarizes your health conditions, medications, healthcare providers, emergency contacts, and end-of-life care options, for example, advance directives (a living will). Help your loved one to consult with their doctor by phone to complete their care plan. The CDC has guidance on developing a care plan and a fillable care plan form to help you. Determine who will care for you and your loved one should you become ill. Make sure that they understand both of your medical needs, and that they have a copy of each of your care plans.

- **Ensure that you and your loved one follow the directions of your state and local authorities.** Check your county or state websites for timelines, closures, and local information on COVID-19 and how it affects your community. Find contact information for state, local, and tribal governments at usa.gov/state-tribal-governments. Find contact information for local health departments at naccho.org/membership/lhd-directory.

- **Advise your loved one to stay home as much as possible.** Help them to avoid all non-essential outings, and large and small gatherings in private and in public. If they do have to go out, help them to practice social distancing, also called “physical distancing” by ensuring that they keep 6 feet between themselves and others while in public and to avoid close contact with people who do not share their home. Also, help your loved one cover their mouth and nose with a cloth face cover if they must go out in public. The CDC recommends that cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the covering without assistance. For detailed information, see https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html.

- **Help your loved one stay connected.** Help your loved one stay in touch with their friends and family through frequent phone calls, video calls, text or email.
• Limit visits with family members, especially young children. While family members can help run errands, your older loved one should always keep about 6 feet away from them. Have visitors leave food or grocery items at the door rather than entering the home. Avoid inviting young children into the home because it is difficult for them to understand the importance of social distancing.

• Ensure that your loved one has a 1-month supply of medications and a 2-week supply of food to avoid frequent shopping trips and limit their potential exposure to the virus.
  – A 1-month supply of prescription medication includes over-the-counter medications like cough suppressants and fever reducing drugs. Ask their pharmacy if prescriptions can be delivered to their home, or if you can pick up their medicines using a drive thru. Order medication refills for them as you normally would. Consider having on hand a thermometer and supplies of distilled water for CPAP machines if needed.
  – A 2-week supply of food also includes water, household cleaning and disinfection supplies, bar or liquid soap, paper products, personal hygiene items, and medical supplies or equipment. Contact their local grocery stores to see if they offer online ordering with options for contact-free home delivery or curbside pick-up.

• Cancel all of their non-essential, in-person doctor’s appointments. Help to arrange telemedicine services for your loved one, which enables them to communicate with a doctor over video, phone or email, rather than face-to-face. Know the COVID-19 symptoms and additional steps you may be able to take to protect yourself and your loved one; see cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html. Call your healthcare professional if you have concerns or if you or your loved one becomes sick.

• Beware of scams. Unfortunately, scammers are taking advantage of people’s fears and the Federal Trade Commission has tips to help protect you and others. There currently are no vaccines, pills, lotions or other prescription or over-the-counter products available to treat or cure COVID-19 online or in stores. Beware of “viral videos” suggesting potentially dangerous or toxic home preventatives, such as drinking excessive amounts of water or mouthwash.

Coping with Stress

Fear and anxiety about the COVID-19 pandemic can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions. Please see redcross.org/coronavirus for information on coping with stress.

Additional Resources:

• See cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html for more information and resources
• See redcross.org/coronavirus for more information and resources
• National Institute on Aging, offers extensive online information including a section caregiving
• Find local caregiving resources at: aarp.org/crf; eldercare.acl.gov or call 211
• Visit AARP’s Caregiving during Coronavirus resources at: aarp.org/coronavirus AARP’s Prepare to Care guide is free and available to all: aarp.org/preparetocare
• Find your local food bank at feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank. Different food banks have different procedures. Call first to check your food bank’s requirements.
• Call 211 for community resources and referrals. Or visit the national 211 Call Center Search website to find the 211 information and referral center nearest you.
• Visit auntbertha.com for other local resources.
• Contact the HOPE Crisis Hotline to receive free virtual support from financial experts on mitigating the financial impacts of COVID-19. For assistance call: 1-888-388-HOPE (4673) or go to OperationHOPE.org.
• National Disaster Distress Helpline: Available to anyone experiencing emotional distress related to COVID-19. Call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 to speak to a caring counselor.
  – Deaf/Hard of Hearing: Text TalkWithUs to 66746. Use your preferred relay service to call the Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990, TTY 1-800-846-8517.
  – Spanish Speakers. Call 1-800-985-5990 and press “2” From the 50 States, text Hablanos to 66746. From Puerto Rico, text Hablanos to 1-787-339-2663.
• If you are feeling overwhelmed with emotions such as sadness, depression, anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or someone else, call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).