

## Family Caregivers of Older Adults during COVID-19

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 illness from the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19, which means the best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus.

Know the COVID-19 [symptoms](#) and additional steps you can take to protect yourself and your loved one by visiting the CDC website at [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus). Use this tip sheet to learn how you can be an effective caregiver while also taking care of yourself during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Take steps to stay healthy

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.** Soap and water are always preferable, but if soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- **Always cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze** or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash. Immediately wash your hands afterwards.
- **Clean AND disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily**, including tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, remote controls, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks. Detailed information on cleaning and disinfecting is available at [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/disinfecting-your-home.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/disinfecting-your-home.html)
- **When caring for individuals who are at high risk for serious illness from COVID-19, wear a [cloth face covering](#) or mask.** When you go out in public, wear a [cloth face covering](#) and practice physical distancing by keeping 6 feet between you and others. Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unable to remove it without help. Detailed information is available at [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html)

### Create a caring support team

- **Create a caring support team made up of several trusted individuals who 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 if their doctor recommends it (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](https://www.auntbertha.com). Find your local food bank at [feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank](https://feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank).

### Advise your loved one to stay home as much as possible

- **Advise your loved one to stay home as much as possible and avoid close contact with people who do not share their home.** Most states are gradually allowing businesses to re-open while employing a range of specific mitigation strategies to slow the spread of COVID-19. It is important for older adults to understand that while many businesses are reopening, [mitigation strategies](#) include protecting individuals at increased risk for severe illness, including older adults and individuals of any age with underlying health conditions. Therefore, older adults should continue to avoid all non-essential outings, and large and small gatherings in private and in public. Encourage them to only go out to purchase essential supplies if they cannot be delivered, for exercise and walking pets, or to visit medical professionals or leave during an emergency.
- If your loved one does have to go out in public, **help them to practice physical distancing by ensuring that they keep 6 feet between themselves and others AND cover their mouth and nose with a [cloth face covering](#)** if they can wear one safely.
- **Help them to limit in-person visits with family members and friends, especially young children**, as it is difficult for children to understand the importance of physical distancing. While family members and friends may help run errands, visitors should leave food or grocery items at the door rather than entering the home. Your older loved one should keep about 6 feet away from them and wear a [cloth face covering](#) if they can wear one safely, as should visitors dropping off supplies.
- **Encourage your loved one to discuss with their doctor whether it would be better to conduct visits face-to-face or through telemedicine.** Telemedicine allows doctors to meet with patients virtually, through live video, phone, or instant messaging. They

should follow the guidance of their primary care providers and specialists on whether to conduct healthcare visits via video, phone, email, or face-to-face, and when and how best to get lab work and other tests and procedures done. Help them to arrange healthcare visits via video or phone if their doctor recommends it.

- **Help your loved one stay connected** with their friends and family through frequent phone or video calls, texts, or email.

## Know the COVID-19 symptoms and steps you can take to protect your loved one

- Know the COVID-19 [symptoms](#) and additional steps you can take to protect yourself and your loved one by visiting the CDC website at [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus). Call a healthcare professional if you have concerns or if you or your loved one becomes sick.

## Ensure they have a 1-month supply of their medications and a 2-week supply of food and supplies

- **A 1-month supply of prescription medication** includes over-the-counter medications like cough suppressants, fever-reducing drugs, a thermometer, and other medical supplies or equipment. 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 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, and personal hygiene items. Contact their local grocery stores to see if they offer online ordering with options for contact-free home delivery or curbside pick-up.

## Plan for what you will do if you or your loved one gets sick

- **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 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 they understand both of your medical needs, and that they have a copy of each of your care plans.

## Beware of scams

- Unfortunately, scammers are taking advantage of people's fears and the [Federal Trade Commission](#) has tips to help protect you and your loved one. 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.

## Ensure that you and your loved one follow the directions of your state/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](https://usa.gov/state-tribal-governments) and local health departments at [naccho.org/membership/lhd-directory](https://naccho.org/membership/lhd-directory).

## Coping with stress

- Fear and anxiety about the COVID-19 pandemic can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions. See [redcross.org/coronavirus](https://redcross.org/coronavirus) for information on coping with stress. Complete a free online course from the Red Cross on [Psychological First Aid: Supporting Yourself and Others During COVID-19](#).

## Additional Resources

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Center for Disease Control at <a href="https://cdc.gov/coronavirus">cdc.gov/coronavirus</a></li><li>• American Red Cross at <a href="https://redcross.org/coronavirus">redcross.org/coronavirus</a></li><li>• National Institute on Aging at <a href="https://nia.nih.gov">nia.nih.gov</a> and includes a section <a href="#">caregiving</a>.</li><li>• Call 211 for local resources. Or visit <a href="https://211search.org">211search.org</a> to find a referral center near you. See <a href="https://auntbertha.com">auntbertha.com</a> and <a href="https://eldercare.acl.gov">eldercare.acl.gov</a> for local resources</li><li>• AARP at <a href="https://aarp.org/coronavirus">aarp.org/coronavirus</a>, <a href="https://aarp.org/crf">aarp.org/crf</a> and <a href="https://aarp.org/preparetocare">aarp.org/preparetocare</a></li><li>• Find your local food bank at <a href="https://feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank">feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank</a>. Call first to check requirements</li><li>• Contact HOPE Crisis Hotline at 1-888-388-HOPE (4673) or go to <a href="https://OperationHOPE.org">OperationHOPE.org</a> for free virtual support on managing the financial impacts of COVID-19</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• National <a href="#">Disaster Distress Helpline</a>: 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<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Deaf/Hard of Hearing. Text TalkWithUs to 66746. Use your preferred relay service to call 1-800-985-5990. TTY 1-800-846-8517</li><li>○ Spanish Speakers. Call 1-800-985-5990 and press "2" or from the 50 States, text Hablanos to 66746. From Puerto Rico, text Hablanos to 1-787-339-2663</li></ul></li><li>• 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)</li></ul> |
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