

Take Care of Yourself

Managing Pre-Existing Conditions

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), people with chronic disease are at higher risk of having a serious reaction if they catch COVID-19. Taking steps to manage chronic conditions, such as heart or lung disease, is more important than ever.

Conditions that can affect coronavirus recovery, especially if not controlled, include diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, moderate to severe asthma, weakened immune system, liver disease, chronic kidney disease, cancer, and severe obesity. To learn how these conditions increase risk go [here](#).

Here are some ways to reduce your risk of getting a severe case of coronavirus:

Stay Active: Being physically active improves general health and is essential to managing chronic disease. The list of benefits is endless. Many of these benefits have direct impact on chronic diseases. For instance, physical activity reduces blood pressure, improves lung capacity, improves cholesterol and blood sugar levels, and helps people sleep.

People may not know how to be active when their options are more limited than normal. Here are some suggestions from the World Health Organization (WHO):

- Set a goal: Choose a specific day, time and type of activity and minutes you will do them.
- Set up a schedule and reminder: It probably won't happen if you leave it to chance. Make an appointment for yourself, set a time on your Outlook or Google calendar, etc.
- Choose an activity that has a low risk of injury

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Here are some specific activity ideas from the WHO:

- Reduce sitting time: We are sitting more than usual during work hours. Break up sitting time with active breaks. Take a three to five minute active break for every 20 to 30 minutes you sit.
- Be active with family and friends in your “bubble”: Do active games like jump rope or hopscotch with your children. Arrange time for walking or cycling in your neighborhood, in areas with no crowds.
- Set up times to be active with those outside your “bubble” virtually.
- Climb the stairs.
- Catch up on household chores like vacuuming and mopping floors.
- Do muscle strengthening exercises. If you do not have weights, use filled water bottles or cans of food.
- Dance to music.

While performing physical activity indoors is beneficial, try to get outside if you can. One reason is that time outside exposes you to Vitamin D. Vitamin D is absorbed from sunlight and helps build the immune system. Health experts recommend spending at least 15 minutes a day in sunlight. People may be fearful of venturing outside to be active. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), here are ways to stay safe:

- Do not exercise if you have a fever, cough or difficulty breathing.
- If exercising outside (e.g. a walk or bike ride) practice social distancing and wash your hands before and after.
- If you are not regularly active, start slowly with lower intensity activities and shorter times. Increase time and intensity slowly.

Eat Healthy: Nutrition and health are closely related. Eating healthfully boosts overall health, and helps prevent and control chronic diseases. For instance, eating less saturated fats helps prevent and manage heart disease. Eating a lot of fruits and vegetables helps combat cancer. And controlling carbohydrates is critical to preventing and managing diabetes. Follow national [healthy eating guidelines](#). And be sure to follow specific instructions from your physician or dietitian.

Even normally, eating healthfully can be challenging. Under the present circumstances it can be harder to get the healthy foods you need. Here are some tips:

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- If you have difficulty finding fresh fruits and vegetables, choose frozen or canned versions. These have the same nutritional value as fresh.
- Keep your pantry stocked with nutritious foods that have a long shelf life. For a list of what to get go [here](#).
- Grocery shopping can be challenging during this time. Opt for contactless shopping through services where you can order online, and items are dropped off at your door. The next best option is curbside service from local grocers. If you must go into a store, use all safety precautions. Go [here](#) to learn what to do.

Get Enough Sleep: Adults should get seven to nine hours of sleep per night. An important benefit of getting enough sleep is that sleep enhances the immune system. Sleeping enough also helps lower stress and can improve mood. Sleep also helps people maintain weight and lower risk of for health problems such as diabetes and heart disease. Getting enough sleep can be tricky – especially when under stress. Learn how to improve your sleep during the COVID-19 crisis [here](#).

Quit Smoking: The coronavirus primarily attacks the lungs. Smoking can weaken the lungs, making it harder to fight against the coronavirus. Smoking also hurts heart health and increases blood pressure – these are also risk factors for COVID-19. By quitting smoking, the lungs to start healing. Some benefits of quitting can be seen within days, including reduced blood pressure and the amount of CO2 in the lungs. To learn more about quitting, go [here](#).

Listen to your doctor: Make sure to follow your doctors’ guidelines. This includes getting routine blood tests, checkups, or taking medications.

- Explore home options: Visiting to health care facilities can be daunting now. Still, it is important to follow through on your check ups and tests. Fortunately, home options such as tele-health exist. Discuss these with your care provider. Your care provider can also counsel you on which test or procedures you need now, and which can be delayed.
- Stock up on medications and supplies: Medications are essential when managing some conditions. Those with chronic conditions need to limit going out even more than the general public. Stocking up on medications and supplies will reduce your need to go into pharmacies and grocery stores.

- Plan ahead. Delivery is taking longer than usual. Don't wait till the last minute to order the supplies or medications you need.
- Find companies that will deliver your medications to your house.
- If you need to go to the pharmacy, use the drive-thru to limit contact with people.
- Check with your health insurance ahead of time to see what is covered.
- Discuss options for receiving longer supply of medications with your care provider.

Have a care plan: Determine who will take care of you, should you become ill. Talk with this person about exactly what you might need.

Nurture your Mental Health: Managing chronic disease can be difficult under the best of circumstances. During a crisis like COVID-19, it can be even more stressful. Social distancing, while important to reduce spread of COVID-19, creates additional pressure on emotional wellbeing. Do not neglect your mental health. Find creative ways to stay connected to others through technology or other socially distant methods. The campus' [Faculty Staff Assistance Services](#) is available to all employees. They are seeing clients via phone and web during this time. In addition, [the Coping with COVID-19 online toolkit](#) has many helpful ideas on how to take care of your emotional needs.

Follow the COVID-19 national guidelines: These guidelines are especially important for people at high risk. Here's what to, and what not to do:

- Avoid contact with sick people.
- Stay at home – follow national, state and local orders.
- Wash our hands often
- Avoid touching your face.
- If you must go out,
 - stay at least six feet away from others
 - wear a cloth face mask.
 - avoid touching surfaces
- Make sure everyone in your home follows these guidelines.

For more details [go here, here or here](#).

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It is always important to manage conditions, but due to the coronavirus it is even more important now. Give yourself a greater chance to fight against coronavirus. Take care of yourself!

Learn more: Our Coping with COVID-19 toolkit provides links to sites that give instructions tailored to specific conditions. Go [here](#) to see the list.

Here are some other sites with helpful information:

[USDA connection between nutrition and health](#)

[Sleep Foundation guidelines during COVID-19](#)

[CNN: Understanding underlying conditions to COVID-19](#)

[WHO being physically active during COVID-19](#)

[Food planning during COVID-19](#)