

A healthier today

# Rush Generations

and a vital tomorrow

## Rush Experts Offer COVID-19 Tips for Older Adults

The coronavirus that causes the illness COVID-19 is having a big impact on daily life. Rush Generations has put together the following information to help you stay healthy, upbeat, engaged and strong as we all work together to figure out the new normal.

**We're always here to help.** If you have questions about COVID-19, call Rush at 888-352-7874. To connect with a social worker and get information about services in the community, call the Rush Generations Help Line at 800-757-0202.

### Stay Healthy

You've probably heard that older people are more at risk from COVID-19. "Older adults, as well as those with chronic health conditions, are at higher risk for severe COVID-19 illness due to weaker immune systems that make it more challenging to fight off viral illnesses," explains **Poonam Merai, MD**, a Rush geriatrician.

Some health conditions, such as asthma, lung disease and heart disease with complications, can also increase the risk and severity of illness. Others at higher risk include people who are immunocompromised, people with severe obesity and those who have chronic conditions like diabetes, kidney problems, or liver conditions.

Merai shares her top three tips for protecting yourself:

- Avoid leaving your home as much as possible. If you do go out, maintain a safe distance from people — at least six feet — to help prevent spread of the virus.
- [Wash your hands often](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (and [click here](#) for tips on how to keep your hands from getting dried out and cracked). If you're not near soap and water, you'll want to use [hand sanitizer](#).
- Have at least two weeks' worth of food, household supplies and medications in case you're unable to leave your home.

### Helpful links

- [Click here](#) to take an online self-assessment if you're worried that you've been exposed to the coronavirus.
- [Here's the latest official information from Rush about COVID-19.](#)
- [The dos and don'ts of social distancing.](#)
- AARP is hosting [a live coronavirus information tele-town hall](#) every Thursday at noon Central time.

### Stay Upbeat

Managing stress and anxiety is key to both physical and mental health, says **Erin Emery-Tiburcio, PhD**, a clinical geropsychologist and co-director of the Rush Center for Excellence in Aging.

"Stress can make any health condition worse," she says, "and can also put us at risk for new health conditions. When we're chronically stressed, the part of the nervous system that gets us ready to fight off an attacker or

# A healthier today

# Rush Generations

## and a vital tomorrow

run away is in overdrive. And other bodily functions, including digestion, blood sugar management and your immune system, get slowed down. Having as strong an immune system as possible is important to avoid getting a virus.”

Focusing on the things we actually have control over is the biggest help, says Emery-Tiburcio. “We can control our own choices about social distancing, hand washing and limiting risk by staying home. We cannot control how others behave, or how the virus is spreading, how long this will last, or what it will do to the economy at large. So when your mind goes to these things, identify what you can do right now, today, and let go of the rest.”

### Helpful links

- If you're feeling distressed and need to talk to someone right away, you can talk to a trained crisis counselor by calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-8255), calling the Disaster Distress Helpline (800-985-5990; TTY 800-846-8517) or texting TALKWITHUS to 66746.
- [Click here](#) for a Rush Discover Health article about how mindfulness practice can help with anxiety.
- A Rush psychologist offers three tips for coping with worry about the future in [this article](#).

### Stay Engaged

Social isolation can put older adults at increased risk for cognitive decline, says **Rebecca Lahey, MSW, LCSW**, manager of mental health and collaborative care in Rush's Department of Social Work and Community Health. “Being isolated can get in the way of healthy routines,” she says, “so it's important to keep doing things that support wellness — like taking medications as prescribed and keeping a consistent sleep schedule — and think of creative ways to keep your mind engaged.”

Eating a healthy diet and staying physically active are crucial, Lahey says. “Don't fall into the trap of sitting all day. Go outside for fresh air while following social distancing guidelines, and be intentional about incorporating movement into your day.”

In addition, she suggests using phone or video chats to connect with friends and family, and doing activities that stimulate your mind, such as reading, jigsaw puzzles, crossword puzzles, and even adult coloring books. Lahey, along with the CDC and other experts, also recommends going on a “news diet” — reducing stress by taking a break from watching, reading or listening to the news.

### Helpful links

- We put together [a list of ideas for fun and interesting things you can do, see and watch](#). If you've found other resources you enjoy, please email them to [Rush\\_Generations@rush.edu](mailto:Rush_Generations@rush.edu). We'd love to share your suggestions.
- Stay connected to friends and family — even set up a virtual story time with grandchildren! — by using a video calling app like Skype. [This tutorial on setting up Skype](#) lives on a website that has a number of other technology tutorials available.
- [Here's some advice from Discover Health](#) on fighting the effects of social isolation.

# A healthier today Rush Generations and a vital tomorrow

## Stay Strong

**Ellen Carbonell, LCSW**, coordinator of resource centers and clinical lead in the Health and Aging Department at Rush University Medical Center, wants to make sure you take good care of yourself if you're a caregiver: "If you're able to, go into your own space to recharge alone and read, meditate or listen to music. Even just 15 minutes a couple of times a day can be helpful."

With respite options like home health aides, day programs and even visits from friends not available, "it's important to reach out to friends and groups that might be connecting online instead of in person," Carbonell says. (If you've been attending a Rush Generations support group and want to see if it has moved to virtual meetings, call us at 800-757-0202.) And taking advantage of delivery services from grocery stores, pharmacies and restaurants can free you from having to run stressful errands.

Most of all, Carbonell says, it's important to put aside guilt that you're not doing a good job. "If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed, schedule worry time," she suggests: 10 minutes where you write down everything you're concerned about, then fold up that piece of paper, put it aside and leave your worries there until the next scheduled worry time.

## Helpful links

- Read about ways to stay safe and prevent burnout in [this Rush Discover Health story](#).
- You'll find even more suggestions for self-care in [this Discover Health story](#).
- If you're having a difficult time and need support, the 24-hour, toll-free Friendship Line for older adults offers a caring ear and friendly conversation at 800-971-0016.
- [AARP's online caregiving forum](#) offers a place where you can ask questions and share tips.

## Need help?

- If you have questions about COVID-19, call Rush at 888-352-7874. To connect with a social worker and get information about services in the community, call the Rush Generations Help Line at 800-757-0202.
- The Senior Helpline from the Illinois Department of Aging (800-252-8966; TTY 888-206-1327) is staffed Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. You can also visit their website by [clicking here](#).
- If you need food, try the following:
  - Lakeview Food Pantry in Chicago is taking phone orders for pickup: 773-302-0125.
  - The Greater Chicago Food Depository at 773-247-3663 can help with food resources in your area.
  - In the city of Chicago, call 311 to be connected to your nearest senior center, which will have boxed meals to go and may also have a food pantry.