



## Family Caregiver Concerns During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Now that most of us have been practicing social distancing for more than a month, it's becoming apparent that our experience depends in part on our life circumstances. People who still must work around others—healthcare workers, grocery workers, mail carriers, bus drivers—are all heroes, and let's not forget to honor and thank them! Parents are scrambling to telecommute while ensuring their children are keeping up with online lessons. And people who also are providing care support for elderly loved ones have an extra set of concerns.

**If your loved one lives with you.** By now, you are probably very familiar with the steps you should take to protect yourself and your loved one against the virus. Seniors are at highest risk of serious illness and death from the novel coronavirus, and the best way to avoid that is to keep them away from exposure. The recommended degree of social distancing can be challenging—no visits from the grandkids, no trips to the senior center, and often, cancelled healthcare appointments. Remind your loved one to wash their hands often and correctly, and to wear a mask in situations where it might be hard to distance. The same goes for you! Carelessness could mean that you could bring the virus home. Yes, there is a lot of “togetherness,” so maintain your social lifelines and take some “me time” even as you're quarantined.

**If your loved one lives in a senior living community.** Older adults are more vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19, so skilled nursing facilities, assisted living communities and other supported senior living organizations are taking strict precautions to prevent the spread of the virus. Most



likely, at this time you will not be allowed to visit your loved one. This can feel heartbreaking, especially if you were one of the many devoted family members who regularly visit to support their loved one's care! But the facility will have ways to keep you connected. Ask about video visits. Check out your loved one's community Facebook page, as well—many have become quite active these days. Call frequently, and urge friends and family to reach out, as well. And of course, letter writing never goes out of style. Many senior living residents even report having more contact with more family members than usual these days!

**If your loved one lives alone, and far away.** You might be tempted to hop on a plane to help ... but of course, that isn't advised now. Some of the suggestions for senior living residents apply to home dwelling seniors, as well. Call, email or video chat with your loved one frequently. Remind them how important it is for them to stay home. Many of your loved one's usual supports will be unavailable at this time, so you may have to remotely arrange for substitutes. Contact your loved one's local senior services agency. An aging life care professional

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# Scam Alert: Con Artists Prey on Coronavirus Fears



From natural disasters to world disturbances, any time there is big news that worries people, con artists are quick to capitalize on our fears and concerns.

We haven't seen a more concerning current event than the COVID-19 pandemic in many years—and no sooner did the word “coronavirus” begin to appear in the headlines than fraudsters unleashed their own epidemic of schemes.

We can't immunize ourselves and our loved ones against the coronavirus yet, but we can ward off con artists with a “shot” of awareness! First, let's learn what to look out for.

## Experts are raising awareness of several types of COVID-19 scams you might encounter

- Unscrupulous marketers selling fake products that claim to treat, diagnose or prevent the virus.
- Callers pretending to be from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or

health department, telling you that you've been exposed to the virus—and asking for your health insurance information or bank account number.

- Similar calls and emails, claiming to contain information about the upcoming government stimulus checks.
- Emails claiming to contain important information from the World Health Organization (WHO) or the CDC, with links to malicious websites that can steal your personal data or even hold your computer for ransom.
- Phony charities or crowdfunding appeals, purporting to collect donations to fund research or to help people who are affected by the virus; instead, the money you give supports a drug addict's habit or a crook's lavish lifestyle.
- Attempts to bill insurance companies and Medicare for nonexistent or useless tests and treatments.
- Shady investment opportunities, taking advantage of the economic uncertainty of the times—or, claiming to be selling stock in a miracle product that they claim will skyrocket in value.
- Phony “work from home opportunities” that take advantage of people whose job security is jeopardized.
- Inflated prices for disinfecting wipes, toilet paper, face masks and other commodities that are, or are perceived to be, in short supply.
- Con artists who offer to pick up groceries or prescriptions for you—only to run off with your money, never to be seen again.

## Prevention is key

- Educate yourself—knowledge is power. For example, some scammers have been advertising COVID-19 vaccines, though no such vaccine exists. Others have been marketing “tests” that don't work, even

setting up phony testing centers. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration warns that companies are making deceptive claims about teas, essential oils and supplements, as well.

- Alert senior loved ones about these scams, and encourage them to share the information with their friends. Older adults are often targeted by con artists, and once a senior has fallen for a scam or even talked to the caller, they are often added to a list of likely victims and targeted all the more relentlessly.
- Don't click on email links from sources you don't know, and keep your antivirus software up to date
- Be very suspicious of product offers that use language like "your doctor doesn't want you to know about this."
- If you receive an unsolicited call or email, never provide your credit card number or Medicare ID number. Hang up the phone, or delete the email.
- Regularly check your credit card, insurance and Medicare statements and report any suspicious claims and charges.

### If you think you or a loved one has been victimized

The U.S. Department of Justice says to:

- Contact the National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline by phone at 866-720-5721, or send an email to [disaster@leo.gov](mailto:disaster@leo.gov).
- Report it to the FBI at [tips.fbi.gov](http://tips.fbi.gov)
- If it's an online scam, submit your complaint online through [www.ic3.gov/default.aspx](http://www.ic3.gov/default.aspx)

## New Insights Into Hearing Loss and Fall Risk



It's long been known that vision loss raises the risk of falls. Studies show that hearing problems, too, can make it more likely that we will sustain a fall. One reason is that when our brains must focus intensely on understanding speech and other sounds, this distracts us and makes us less likely to notice a hazard that could trip us up. Sound also provides clues about the environment we're in.

A March 2020 study from the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital showed that our balance mechanism works better in an environment where there is background noise, rather than in total silence. "This review highlights the importance of hearing for our sense of balance," said Associate Professor of Otolaryngology Dr. Maura Cosetti, MD. "And because hearing loss is treatable, getting hearing checked is a crucial first step."

### Monthly Wordfind and More!

Be sure to visit our online edition at [rphmessenger.com](http://rphmessenger.com) to download our monthly wordfind for Older Americans Month, view our infographic about staying engaged during social isolation, and read more healthy aging news and tips!



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(geriatric care manager) can also help; these experts are finding innovative ways to provide service at this time.

**If your loved one is living with dementia.** The life changes brought on by the pandemic can be disorienting for anyone. For people with Alzheimer's disease or a related disorder, this time is especially difficult. As much as you can, maintain your loved one's routine. Experts from Rutgers University offer this advice: "If you observe more agitation, do something with them that is familiar. Play music, look through photo albums, play a game. Let them know that they are safe and you are there to help. A soothing touch, brushing their hair or a hug may bring calm and reduce agitation." (Find more advice [here](#).)

**If your loved one, or you, are feeling anxiety and depression.** Be aware of the very common emotional responses you and your loved one are likely to be experiencing. In a recent article, grief expert David Kessler told the Harvard Business Review that we are all dealing with tremendous losses: "The loss of normalcy; the fear of economic toll; the loss of connection. This is hitting us and we're grieving." Acknowledging our feelings is the first step to coping with them. What else can help? We can exercise, eat well, spend some time outdoors for some natural light, and avoid a steady diet of news. If depression and anxiety worsen, contact your or your loved one's healthcare provider.

**If you're hearing ageist comments.** This is one more unfortunate bit of fallout from the pandemic. As the situation developed, some news outlets made hateful, demeaning statements about older adults, and these thoughts have been magnified in social media. (Calling the virus the "boomer remover" and speaking as if seniors are expendable are just a couple of examples.) If you see this, say something. Your loved one might internalize these messages, and younger people are also damaged by a diminished view of their own future aging. Take this time to express your appreciation and gratitude to your loved one.