

Keeping healthy and maintaining functional independence during COVID-19 related activity restrictions

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is recognized that there are groups of people who are at a high risk of serious illness in the event of COVID-19 transmission.^{1,2} These include the following:

- People 60 years and older³
- People who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility

And also includes people with underlying health conditions,^{1,4} which include:

- People with chest conditions such as cystic fibrosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), other chronic lung diseases and/or moderate to severe asthma⁴
- People who have serious heart conditions.¹ This includes women who are pregnant with significant heart disease (congenital or acquired).⁴
- People who are immunocompromised:^{1,4}
 - Many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening/suppression medications
 - Includes those with rare diseases that significantly increase the risk of infections
- People with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher)¹
- People with diabetes¹
- People with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis¹
- People with liver disease¹
- People with limited mobility which impacts the quality of their respiratory function

Key actions to maintaining health and functional independence for high risks groups during COVID-19 related activity restrictions:

Medication management



Try to ensure your medications are taken routinely/as prescribed.

You should avoid purchasing medications yourself, because exposing yourself to crowded areas is not recommended.⁴ Therefore, asking a family member or friend to purchase your medications is best to avoid exposure.

Nutrition

Maintaining good nutritional status is important before, during and after an infection. Infections can cause great strain on the body systems especially when these cause fever.⁴ To beat infection, the body needs extra energy and nutrients. Therefore, maintaining a healthy diet is very important during the COVID-19 pandemic. While no foods or dietary supplements can prevent COVID-19 infection, maintaining a healthy diet is an important part of supporting a strong immune system.⁴ To maintain good nutrition during the COVID-19 pandemic, the following actions are recommended:⁴

- When you can, aim to eat a variety of foods with priority given to fruits and vegetables; where you can, try to avoid highly processed/packaged foods



¹ CDC (2020). Groups at Higher Risk for Severe Illness.

² NHS (2020). Corona Virus: Shielding

³ WHO (2020). Supporting older people during the COVID-19 pandemic is everyone's business

⁴ FAO (2020). Maintaining a Healthy Diet During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Whole grains, nuts, and healthy fats such as in olive, sesame, peanut or other oils rich in unsaturated fatty acids are beneficial to your immune system and reduce inflammation
- Limit your intake of fats, sugar, and salt as much as you can
- Do your best to make sure your food is clean before consuming it
- Drink water regularly when you can (6-8 glasses per day is considered ideal)
- Limit alcohol consumption as this can cause additional stress on the body systems and ultimately weaken the immune system

Physical positioning and keeping active!

- For those with heart and respiratory conditions, maintain safe and comfortable positioning when lying in bed or on another surface. For those with difficulty breathing when lying flat, using pillows or rolled up blankets/spare clothes to support the upper back to raise the chest is recommended. This will enable a better position for breathing.⁵



- Elevate your feet: If you have oedema/swelling in your legs or feet, you may find it comfortable to put pillows or rolled up blankets/spare clothes under your legs to reduce the swelling.⁵



- For people with sleep apnoea, you may find it useful to sleep on your side to reduce symptoms overnight.⁵



- Keep active and engage in your regular activities of daily living as much as is possible under the COVID-19 restrictions.
- Where engagement in your normal activities is not currently possible, discuss with family and friends, other activities within the home that may be beneficial e.g. meal preparation.
- Apply energy conservation principles^{5,6} to your daily routine to ensure that your activity hours are balanced with rest and therefore you can stay active throughout coming days and weeks without the onset of significant fatigue.

Energy conservation principles which can support your daily routine: ⁶

- Ask for help for tiring activities and gradually work towards independence with these as you can
- Staying active within your limits will help you keep up your energy levels
- Ensure you include rest and leisure activities into your day where possible
- Try not to stay in the same position for a long time
- Break down activities into smaller tasks and do these separately with rest-breaks in between
- Plan your activities: complete important activities first and collect the items you need before starting the activity
- A fifteen-minute break every hour is better than a one-hour break after four hours of work
- Sit down where possible rather than standing the whole-time during activity
- Use lightweight items and a trolley (e.g. shopping or laundry trolley) to decrease the amount of lifting and carrying you do

⁵Swiss Medical Weekly (2004). The role of body position and gravity in the symptoms and treatment of various medical diseases.

⁶Every day Health (2020) Senior health: 21 Energy-Saving Tips to Ease Life with Chronic Illness

- Place commonly used items at waist height to decrease lifting and bending

And remember, other lifestyle factors are critical part of maintaining wellbeing and a healthy immune system.⁴ A healthy lifestyle includes additional strategies such as:

Not smoking



Exercising regularly wherever you can



Getting adequate sleep



Minimizing and coping with stress

