



Caregiving Challenges During the Covid-19 Pandemic

In his New York Times Article, [‘I’m Really Isolated Now’: When Elders Have to Fight Coronavirus Alone](#),” journalist John Leland describes what many family caregivers already know, that the steps older adults are being asked to take to prevent the spread of Covid-19 increases their risks of social isolation, which carries its own risks.” Stephanie Cacioppo, assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral neuroscience at the University of Chicago, says that “the sense of losing control in the pandemic was both harmful and treatable,” and that **social distance need not lead to social isolation**. She recommends the following for caregivers and family members:

Caregivers and family members should try to **help elders feel in control of the precautions** they are being told to take so they feel involved rather than punished by the new rules. **Talk with them about public health crises they have lived through in the past** including polio, tuberculosis, SARS or H1N1 flu. **Clear information helps**: Alarmist news programs can make people feel helpless. Giving them updates every day, or letting them know you’ll contact them again will give them a sense of a future, and help them not feel abandoned.

Anne Gulland’s article, [“Coronavirus elderly advice: How can I help look after vulnerable relatives?”](#) presents helpful strategies for family caregivers of the elderly. She quotes Professor Sir Muir Gray, an expert in healthy ageing, who cautions that “older people should not be left to sit at home on their own. It’s important that people stay engaged and active.” Stay away if you’re ill, but “carry on visiting older people if you are well.”

- **Use technology**: Professor Tahir Masud, president of the British Geriatrics Society, says that digital solutions such as Skype, can work if face-to-face meet-ups are not possible. “We would definitely advocate keeping in touch for moral support.” he says.
- **Shopping for seniors**: Help them determine ways to get their groceries. Many stores and restaurants are doing on-line ordering and deliveries. Check whether pharmacies can deliver their medications.
- **Create an emergency plan**. If you are worried about an elder because you may not be able to visit with them, try to have a contingency plan in place. Medications, important contact numbers, and who can step in when the main caregiver is not well, are examples of information that would be helpful to have.
- **Encourage them to stay active**. Sir Muir Gray says if people are confined at home because they’re self-isolating, it’s paramount they stay active. “Even just standing up 10 times an hour is good exercise.” (Make sure those of you working from home are doing this too!) Older people can be helped to feel more positive if they engage with the world and stay active.”

[Be Well at Work Elder Care Program](#) offers confidential assistance to UC Berkeley faculty, staff, visiting scholars, and postdocs who are caring for or concerned about an elder or dependent adult.

Please email employeeassistance@berkeley.edu to schedule a telephone appointment.