

National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences
(Institute of National Importance)

Well-Being of the elderly during COVID-19



NIMHANS-
Department of Psychiatry
(Geriatric Clinic & Services)

Risk of COVID-19 in older adults:

The percentage of older adults with the COVID-19 requiring hospitalization is 31-59% and mortality of 4-11% as per the World Health Organisation (WHO), Geneva and the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), USA. This risk is much higher in older adults above the age of 85 years. In India though we are in early phase of this pandemic there are signs of similar trend with older adults likely to have higher chances of severe complications related to COVID-19.

What makes older adults at higher risk for mental health issues during COVID-19 pandemic:

- Awareness about older adults having higher risk for severe respiratory problems and death due to COVID-19 can contribute to significant stress, anxiety and other related mental health problems.
- Older adults are likely to experience more stress and difficulty in accessing essential services due to the restrictions enforced to maintain the social distancing precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19
- Older adults are less likely to have social contact using technology and social media which are useful for maintaining social contact despite the need for physical distancing.
- Social isolation is one of the important risk factor for mental health problems like depression and anxiety in older adults
- Older adults have higher chances of worsening of pre-existing medical and psychiatric illness due to difficulty in ensuring regular medication and routine health care due to COVID-19 related restrictions.

- Avoid alcohol and drugs
- Practice social distance but not social isolation
- Try to do some other activities you enjoy such as listening music, drawing
- Connect with others. Be in touch with your relatives/friend over phone/ video call if possible daily and talk about your concerns and how you are feeling
- Get involved in house related matters

Mental health professionals based:

- Brief psychological and psychosocial intervention can be delivered by any health care personnel, volunteers with some guidance and training
- To give appropriate information and clarification about various myths, false messages that are being spread through multiple sources
- Guidance about maintaining routine, physical exercise, Yoga, meditation, healthy diet, mental stimulation through online videos or booklet
- Brief relaxation exercises and supportive therapy can be done for those having more severe psychological distress.
- May require visiting Psychiatrist/ hospitals for medications and other interventions may be required for those with severe mental health disorders and emergencies

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toll free helpline at 080-46110007
or consult your doctor or a
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and increased risk to Covid-19 infection.

- Constraints in terms of staff and space and hence, challenges in implementing the preventive measures
- Difficulty in picking up warning signs for Covid-19 infection or mental issues
- More effect of poor mental health of other inmates
- Existing poor nutrition and poor self-care adds on to issues
- In older adults who are living alone either independently or using assistance from trained caregivers will too have similar problems.

Evaluation and management:

- Defer visiting hospital/clinics for their scheduled appointment or for minor issues.
- Using other mode of communication with the doctors and other health care professionals like phone calls or video conference.
- Increasing the awareness about mental health issues among the older adults and their family members via social media (Online programmes, website, online forum, group email or messages)
- Utilising community health workers, trained social workers for screening of older adults at Oldage homes/assisted living facilities for mental health issues.
- To establish a helpline through which any older adult or family member can approach for minor mental health issues secondary to pandemic
- Hospitals or Individual Psychiatrist to manage their patients by phone/telemedicine
- Those with Psychiatric emergencies like suicidal risk, severe agitation, catatonia, refusal of food, delirium would require personal evaluation in

hospital emergency settings with appropriate precautions related to COVID-19

Psychological interventions for mental health issues related to COVID-19:

Home based (to reduce risk of infection):

- Stay home as much as possible.
- Let other family members go out for getting necessary material
- Have medication stock for at least one month
- Stock fruits and vegetables as per their dietary requirement
- Avoid visits of any relative/friend staying within city or outside
- Postpone doctor's visit if possible
- Take your usual medications for physical illnesses regularly
- If you have pre-existing mental health conditions, you should continue with treatment and be aware of new or worsening symptoms
- Wash your hands often
- Avoid close contact (6 feet, which is about two arm lengths) with people in the home who are sick
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched services
- Make a plan whom you would contact if you develop symptoms
- Be aware of symptoms related to Covid-19

Home based (to manage anxiety):

- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories and social media related to pandemic
- Take care of your physical health
- Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate
- Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals
- Do some yoga or exercise at home if possible
- Get enough sleep

- Avoid alcohol and drugs
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