

HOW TO HELP SENIORS NAVIGATE THE PANDEMIC

JACOB LORINC

Seniors homes across the country have tightened visitation hours and broadened restrictions for the elderly as Canada's older population proves to be at the highest risk of contracting a fatal diagnosis of COVID-19.

"We know now that you're at a higher risk if you're older than 60, especially if you have other conditions like diabetes or are immunosuppressed," said Alison Thompson, a professor of drug safety and health services research at the University of Toronto's faculty of pharmacy. "Everyone younger than 60 should do what they can to ensure they aren't creating more risk."

Thompson and Nathan

Stall, a geriatrics specialist at Mount Sinai Hospital, share how people can help the elderly navigate these perilous times.

Here's what to do and, importantly, what not to do:

LIMIT VISITATIONS

Anything you can do to help the elderly maintain social distancing is crucial, said Thompson. This includes limiting your own contact with them.

If the person you know is in a retirement home, you might consider staying home.

"We know there's a symptomatic transmission of the virus, so just because you feel okay doesn't mean you aren't transmitting the virus yourself. It's not worth the risk."

Some senior care facili-

ties have closed visitations completely anyways, said Stall. But you should still be sure to find alternative ways to stay in contact.

USE TECHNOLOGY

The best way to keep in contact with an elderly person you know is to use technology, said Stall. "Use FaceTime, Zoom, whatever you need to in order to make sure they have everything they need and are feeling okay," he said.

Social isolation comes with its own psychological implications, so it's crucial to stay in contact regularly when possible, said Thompson. "Isolation isn't good for your health to begin, so making an extra effort to stay connected to older people at this point and time is a really good idea."

TAKE CARE OF CHORES IF POSSIBLE

Staying out of contact with others is crucial, so if you can buy groceries for an elderly person you know, or if you can complete other tasks that involve venturing outside, that would be helpful in reducing their exposure to potential illness, said Thompson.

If that isn't possible, Stall also notes that some stores have opened an hour early to give elderly people time to shop before it gets crowded.

CALL ABOUT SYMPTOMS BEFORE SHOWING UP

If your elderly parent or grandparent is experiencing sickness or mild symptoms, make sure they call ahead to a hospital or walk-



Torstar file photo

Irene Krislaty looks out the window from her home in Sutton. As COVID-19 continues to spread around the globe, seniors are most at risk. Advocates are urging the public to stay at home and only go out for essentials.

in clinic instead of showing up, Thompson said.

ISOLATE YOURSELF

For people under 65 years-old, the most valuable thing you can do for an elderly person is to maintain social distancing and keep away from large gatherings, Stall said.

"That's the most helpful thing you can do for grand-

ma," he said. "Older adults have been victimized into thinking they need to be more isolated than the rest of us, when in reality we need to isolate ourselves to help them. When we panic-buy, when we jam the stores, when we go out on St. Patrick's Day instead of avoiding large groups, we're putting them at risk more than ourselves."

KEEP CALM!

...and Wash Your Hands!

Please stay safe! Your friends at

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