

Over 60? Here are the 30 Worst Coronavirus Mistakes

- You didn't plan to spend the best years of your life waking up to headlines that announce older adults "are at a higher risk for severe illness" from the coronavirus. What's worse, the disease, known as COVID-19, can be fatal! It causes a respiratory illness, whose symptoms include fever, cough and difficulty breathing. When it struck China, the majority of deaths, reports the CDC, were in people 60+ with underlying conditions.
- The good news: You can take simple steps to slash your risk of contracting coronavirus and live well into the future. Just avoid each and every one of these common mistakes if you're 60 and up—and share them with a friend or family member like you.



1. Attending Gatherings

- The White House recommends that everyone avoid gatherings of more than 10 people. And experts are advising that older people avoid all unnecessary gatherings and events. Yes, you're going to miss family milestones, Spring fairs, dinners parties and outdoor festivals, which is regrettable—but doing so ensures you can live to enjoy them in the future. Chances are these gatherings will be canceled anyway, as events are shut down nationwide.



2. Visiting Nursing Homes

- It's difficult to go without seeing a friend or loved one who's in a nursing home or rehab facility, and maybe you're in one yourself. But the official recommendation is to postpone those visits for now, unless you're providing critical care. Visit over the phone or online via programs like Zoom or FaceTime or Skype.



3. Seeing the Kids or Grandkids

- This one can hurt the most, but it's possibly the most important. It's believed that younger people can spread coronavirus to older people without showing symptoms, and older people have a higher risk of complications. If your visits aren't essential, it's best to move them to the phone or online until the danger passes. This period won't last forever—but it's crucial right now.



4. Not Social Distancing

- Even if your locality hasn't recommended it, it's important to work from home and stay home as much as possible. Try to maintain distance between yourself and other people when you go out for essentials or to exercise.



5. Not Going Outside At All

- Social distancing doesn't mean turning your home into a bunker. In fact, experts encourage going outside. It's "more than okay. It's a good idea," said doctors from Johns Hopkins on March 17. Exercise is physically and mentally important, especially in stressful times." Just keep your distance from others, avoid contact sports, and wash your hands when you get home.



6. Not Exercising

- Exercise is critical to overall health, and it's important to keep up with it daily, even though your gym may be closed. You can walk or jog around the block or your yard, garden, or do things around the house. And there are dozens of workout apps and online programs—from yoga to boxing—that can keep your health on track, no matter your skill level or interest.



7. Missing Special Shopping Hours in Your Area

- Many stores across the country, including several big chains like Target, have started having special "seniors only" shopping hours. These are usually right when the store opens. You benefit from smaller crowds, shorter lines, and being able to shop when the store's been freshly cleaned.



8. Sharing Misinformation

- You weren't born yesterday. But there are people who prey on anxiety in times of crisis, circulating misinformation online. Before you share anything on social media, make sure it comes from a reputable source, such as a major news outlet, health organization, hospital or agency like the CDC or WHO, or a trusted website.



9. Not Washing Your Hands

- Experts say thorough handwashing is the most effective way to avoid contracting viruses, including coronavirus. Wash your hands every time you use the bathroom, return home from a public place, before and after preparing food, and before eating—basically, as often as is practical.



10. Not Washing Your Hands Long Enough

- Lather up your hands with soap, wash and rinse for 20 seconds total—about as long as it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice or—if you want to boogie—"I Will Survive."



11. Not Getting a Flu Shot

- If you haven't done it yet, it's still not too late. The shot can reduce your risk of getting the flu, whose symptoms can be mistaken for coronavirus.



12. Shaking Hands

- Experts recommend that everyone replace handshakes or greeting hugs with a wave for the time being. That's especially important for people over 60, so you can avoid serious complications.



13. Letting Your Blood Pressure Rise

- If you're taking medication or making lifestyle changes to reduce high blood pressure, it's important to stay on course. High blood pressure has been associated with worse outcomes for people who contract COVID-19.



14. Stocking Up on Junk Food

- When we stock our kitchens for a crisis, we tend to go for the basics—simple carbs (like white bread), processed food and frozen meals, which can be sky-high in sugar and sodium. Those can worsen diabetes and high blood pressure, two conditions associated with COVID-19 complications. Avoid processed food whenever possible and substitute lean proteins, whole grains and fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables. If you need to buy frozen meals, choose those with the lowest amount of sodium and added sugar.



15. Avoiding Home Delivery

- If you need to get food or medication delivered, don't avoid it out of fear of contracting coronavirus. And if you want to treat yourself to a delivery dinner from your favorite restaurant, go for it. "The risk of contracting coronavirus through food has been, and is, extremely small," Martin Wiedmann, a professor of food safety in the Department of Food Science at Cornell University, told the *New York Post* on March 13. He reminds you, however, to wash your hands after accepting the delivery and handling the packaging.



16. Using Cash

- Experts believe that coronavirus can live on paper money for days, increasing the risk of transmission. Pay with plastic whenever you can.



17. Not Disinfecting Your Cell Phone

- Researchers have found our phones can be seven times as dirty as a toilet seat, even during normal times. Make a habit of wiping down your phone with disinfectant once a day. A 50-50 mix of rubbing alcohol and water will do the job.



18. Not Disinfecting "High-Touch" Surfaces

- It's a good idea to wipe down things you touch frequently, like keyboards, remote controls and light switches.



19. Not Seeking Support

- Feelings of loneliness aren't uncommon after 60, and they might be especially intense now. Make it a point to reach out to friends and family as often as possible with phone calls and video chats. If you'd like to talk with a professional, it's never been easier, thanks to online services like Talkspace and Brightside. Your healthcare provider might also be able to connect you with a therapist who can do phone or video sessions.



20. Going Out If You Feel Sick

- If you're feeling unwell, stay home and call your healthcare provider for advice. You might just have a common cold—but going out with any illness that compromises your immune system could make you more susceptible to coronavirus.



21. Not Checking On Others

- "Social distancing only applies to physical space, not all human connections," doctors from Johns Hopkins said on March 17. "If you know someone who can't go outside, call them regularly." Maintaining those social connections will make both of you feel a lot better.



22. Feeling Useless

- This is an unprecedented event, but all of us can take simple, meaningful action to care for others and ourselves. Donate blood to supporting food banks, contribute to children's charities and low-income health clinics, and practice self-care.



23. Going to an ER If You're Not Seriously Sick

- If you have COVID-19 symptoms—namely, cough, fever and shortness of breath—call your healthcare provider and follow their instructions. Don't go to an ER unless you're having serious trouble breathing; you might infect others.



24. Overindulging In Alcohol

- Because of loneliness, stress and medical conditions, it's all too easy for people over 60 to begin self-medicating with booze. That's counterproductive, especially now. Drinking too much can raise your blood pressure and reduce immunity, which can make you more susceptible to coronavirus and its complications. If you're regularly having more than one daily drink (for women) or two (for men), talk with your healthcare provider about reversing that trend.



25. Settling For Less Sleep

- You might find it hard to sleep, particularly now. But it's a myth that humans need less sleep as we age, and insomnia can seriously compromise your health. When we sleep, our immune system recharges, and a lack of quality shut-eye has been associated with other serious conditions like heart disease and cancer. Shoot for seven to nine hours a night. If you're getting less, talk with your healthcare provider about how you can get better rest.



26. Touching Your Face

- This is one of the most common ways to contract illness. Studies show we touch our faces up to a dozen times an hour. You can moisturize your face and use eye drops to reduce itching, or even wear gloves to train yourself to stay hands-down.
- You may think you don't touch for face often. But just for a short while, be very conscious of where your hand goes. You may be very surprised.



27. Not Self-Quarantining If You Suspect You've Been Exposed

- This is key to slowing the spread of the virus, experts say. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions.



28. Not Self-Isolating If You're Infected

- If you're sick with COVID-19, it's important to occupy a separate bedroom from other members of your family if possible. Avoid sharing glasses, plates, silverware and personal items like towels and bedding until you're recovered.
- Recognize the differences between:
 - Social distancing
 - Self Quarantine
 - Self Isolating



29. Taking a Cruise

- Cruises have proven to be an early hotspot for coronavirus. In the wake of experts' advice that older people avoid large gatherings at the moment, if you've booked a cruise, it's a good idea to reschedule.
- I don't think this is an issue. Cruise ships are all docked.



30. Remember, This Isn't Forever

- This is going to be a tough period. You may feel isolated, and with no structure to your day, depressed. Remind yourself that this is a temporary way of life. Make a list of all the amazing things you want to do with your life—and start today the ones you can do indoors.

