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Healthy Insights

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Dealing with the Coronavirus Pandemic

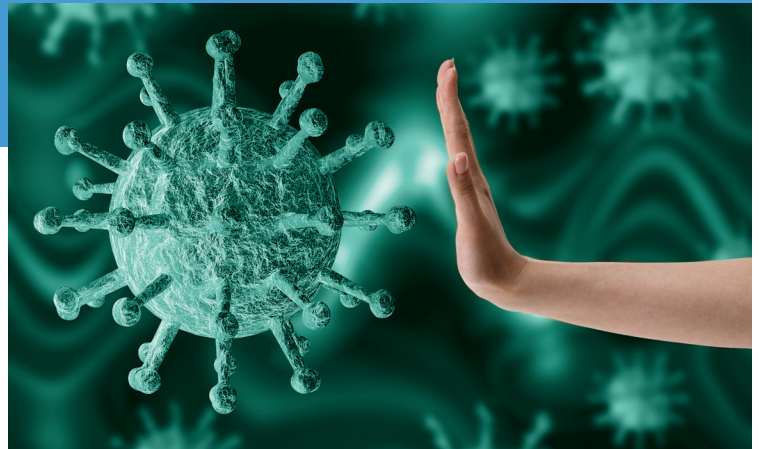
By now, most Americans know the basics of the coronavirus (COVID-19).

The virus is characterized primarily by fever, cough and shortness of breath but may also include fatigue, headaches, and (less frequently) diarrhea. While cases can be mild, moderate or severe, 80 percent of all cases are actually experienced as mild, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

To prevent spreading the virus, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says thorough hand washing is critical, using soap and water for at least twenty seconds. CDC recommends using hand sanitizer as well when soap and water are not available. Household protections include frequent cleaning and disinfecting surfaces like door handles and cellphones.

There's no question that the virus poses greatest risk for senior citizens and individuals with significant underlying illness, such as heart disease, lung disease and diabetes. For seniors and individuals with these risk factors and symptoms, it's important to consult a healthcare provider about special precautions that can be taken.

According to CDC, the best way to avoid illness is to avoid exposure—the ways to do that



include avoiding close contact (within six feet) with others, cleaning hands often and refraining from touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands. Make sure to cover coughs and sneezes and throw away used tissues.

If you're sick, the CDC recommends staying home except for visits to a healthcare provider. It's best for a sick individual to wear a face mask; if one isn't available, take extra precautions to cover coughs and sneezes. (Face masks are critically important for caregivers as well.)

Individuals who have come into close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 also should stay home and contact care providers. This is especially true for seniors, even if symptoms seem mild.

Patients with symptoms as described above should contact their healthcare providers or seek care in an emergency room as needed. By seeing a provider immediately, it can be quickly determined if an individual has the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and therefore needs to be tested.

From the CDC: Taking Care of Your Mental Health

It is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief, and worry during these difficult times. Everyone reacts differently, and your own feelings will change over time. Taking care of your emotional health during an emergency will help you think clearly to protect yourself and your family.

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can result in

- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones;
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns;
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating;
- Worsening of chronic health problems; and
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

Take the following steps to support yourself

- **Take care of your body**—Try to eat healthy well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, and get plenty of sleep. Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Learn more about wellness strategies for mental health.
- **Connect with others**—Share your concerns and how you are feeling with a friend or family member. Maintain healthy relationships, and build a strong support system.

- **Take breaks**—Make time to unwind and remind yourself that strong feelings will fade. Try taking in deep breaths. Try to do activities you usually enjoy.
- **Stay informed**—When you feel that you are missing information, you may become more stressed or nervous. Watch, listen to, or read the news for updates from officials. Be aware that there may be rumors during a crisis, especially on social media. Always check your sources and turn to reliable sources of information like your local government authorities.
- **Avoid too much exposure to news**—Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories. It can be upsetting to hear about the crisis and see images repeatedly. Try to do enjoyable activities and return to normal life as much as possible and check for updates between breaks.
- **Seek help when needed**—If distress impacts activities of your daily life for several days or weeks, talk to a clergy member, counselor, or doctor, or contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) helpline at 1-800-985-5990.

Visit the CDC website for more information about the coronavirus at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus.



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IPRO Healthy Insights is authored by Dr. Clare Bradley, IPRO's Senior Vice President/Chief Medical Officer, and a nationally recognized public health advocate.

IPRO is a non-profit organization that works with government agencies, providers and patients to measure and improve healthcare for all. For over 35 years we've made creative use of clinical expertise, emerging technology and data solutions to make the healthcare system work better.