

Tips for Social Distancing While Caregiving

Caring for loved ones at a distance may be unfamiliar territory, but knowing what tools and programs are available to help you can ease uncertainty.

Right now, we're living in a temporary new normal of caution, social distancing and isolation. If you're one of the millions of caregivers in the U.S., you know that COVID-19 can complicate the day-to-day challenges of caregiving. But, it's important to remember that you can continue to be actively involved in — and make a positive impact on — those you're caring for.

Virtual Caregiving

While it may be frustrating that you're unable to be with your friend or family member in person, remind yourself that what you're doing from a distance does matter. Careful, thoughtful planning and clear communication can help make remote caregiving easier on you and the person you're caring for. Take advantage of available help, including:

- **Virtual communications.** Use smartphones, laptops and tablets to set up video chats. Encourage their family and friends to call them often and/or write notes.
- **Medical alert devices.** Many medical alert systems have features that can help you track and monitor the person in your care. Look for a system that's designed with caregivers in mind. Systems often come with an app that lets designated caregivers check on the location of the person wearing the device and will alert you if your loved one presses the emergency help button.
- **Coordination tools.** Organizations like lotsahelpinghands.com can assist in managing care, rides, meals and appointments for your loved one.

Pharmacy and Prescription Options

If the person you're caring for regularly takes medication, it's important to be sure that they have enough on hand. You may want to find out if their pharmacy offers a mail-order option. Many pharmacies are also waiving delivery fees during the COVID-19 outbreak.

You can also call the number on the back of the member ID card to see if their health plan includes a home delivery option for medications. Whichever delivery method you choose, you may be able to order early refills or get 30- or 90-day supplies.

Food Delivery

Visiting places where it's hard to maintain social distancing — such as the grocery store — may be unsafe for people who are at a higher risk of serious infection. So it can be a good idea to equip your friend or family member with food-delivery options. These might include:

- **Grocery delivery.** While many grocery chains offer curbside pickup, there are also several apps that you can download that allow you to have groceries delivered right outside the home for a small delivery and service fee. Visit supermarket websites or search for “grocery delivery [ZIP code]” on the internet.
- **Restaurant takeout or delivery.** Continue to support local restaurants with curbside pickup or at-home delivery. Not sure if it's safe? The FDA says: “Currently there is no

evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19.” Of course, do what’s comfortable for you.

- **Meal kits.** Many companies today provide kits that have portioned-out ingredients and easy cooking directions. To find some options, look up “meal kit delivery” online to see what’s available in your area.

Whatever option you choose, request that the delivery person drop the food off right outside your door rather than coming inside the home.

Medical Appointments

Look ahead and see which regularly scheduled medical appointments are on your care recipient’s calendar. If an appointment is necessary, using a phone- or video-based telehealth application may be ideal. Telehealth provides access to health care providers from the comfort of home, allowing faster support and reduced exposure to the virus. Call the doctor’s office to see what options are available.

Safety and Cleanliness Best Practices

More than ever, cleanliness and hygiene are of the utmost importance. As a caregiver, it’s vital that you and the person you’re caring for both take every precaution you can to stay healthy.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines include:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily (tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets and sinks).
- Cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face cover when around others or in public.
- Stay at least 6 feet from other people when in public.

Even with diligent social distancing and good hygiene habits, there’s a chance of contracting an illness. If you think you or the person you're caring for have been exposed to COVID-19 or have symptoms, call your primary care provider (PCP) right away. According to the CDC, symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing
- Repeated shaking or chills
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat
- New loss of taste or smell

However, be sure to refer to the CDC's website for a list of new or changed symptoms. In all cases, the CDC says to “follow the guidance of your healthcare provider and local health department.”

Have a Plan of Action

With the current uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak, it's important to regain a sense of control and confidence. The quickest way to do that is to have a game plan, and right now is a great time to revisit any contingency plans you already have — or to put some in place. Some steps may include:

- **Collecting contact information.** Build a list of contacts, including family members, PCPs, pharmacies, care managers, senior service agencies and anyone else that you may need to get ahold of.
- **Gathering health documents.** Because care recipients often have complicated medical situations, keeping all paperwork in one place can be invaluable. This could also include important financial and legal records. Download UnitedHealthcare's [Care Organizer](#) to keep important health records, financial and household information, medication schedules and more in one place and ready for when you may need them.
- **Becoming an Authorized Representative.** UnitedHealthcare wants to make your role as a caregiver as easy as possible. One simple way to smooth out several aspects of caregiving is to make sure you're listed as an Authorized Representative on your care recipient's account. Doing so can streamline tasks that can be done over the phone without needing the member right next to you to provide verbal authorization. These could include helping out with payments and claims and weighing in on choice of doctor and other care issues. To get started, call the Customer Service number on the back of the member's ID card.
- **Having a backup caregiver.** For any numbers of events that can arise — family needs, illness, career obligations or simply some much-needed you-time — it's a good idea to have a backup caregiver (or two) on call.

UnitedHealthcare is committed to making sure you have the information and resources you need to keep you and the person you're caring for stay safe and healthy. We're here for you 24 hours, 7 days a week. For personalized support, call the customer service number on the back of the member's ID card.

Sources:

Family Caregiver Alliance: Caregiver Statistics and Demographics
<https://www.caregiver.org/caregiver-statistics-demographics>

Lotsa Helping Hands
<https://lotsahelpinghands.com/>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration: Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Coronavirus

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

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