

# Providing Care During a Pandemic

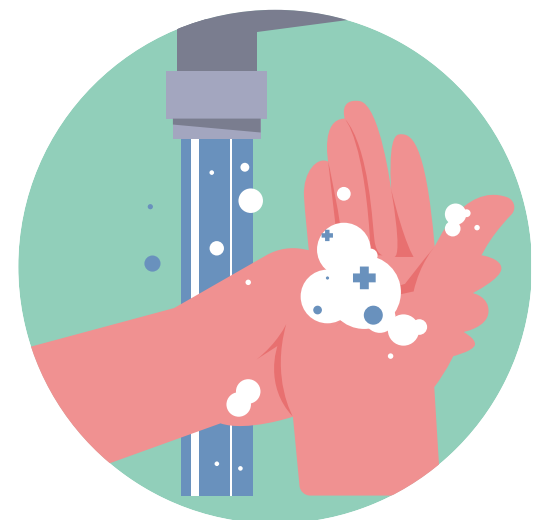


Providing care for a disabled loved one is a demanding but rewarding job. The role and responsibilities of a caregiver may vary depending on what the person being cared for needs. Running errands, helping with daily tasks such as bathing and eating, and providing emotional support are some examples of what may be required of a caregiver. Although caregiving requires lots of patience and many times adjusting your own lifestyle, it is rewarding knowing your loved one is getting care from someone who personally knows and cares for them.

Providing care at any time can be challenging but providing care during a worldwide pandemic comes with its own set of unique challenges. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, older adults and people with underlying health conditions are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, the disease caused by coronavirus. While this does not mean that people with disabilities are inherently more likely to experience severe illness due to COVID-19, research shows that people with disabilities are three times more likely to have heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer than adults without disabilities. For caregivers caring for people with disabilities, extra measures may need to be taken to reduce exposure risks even further. Keeping a sense of normalcy may be difficult but is essential to maintain emotional and social health.

**The following are considerations when providing care for a disabled loved one during a pandemic.**

- If your loved one has a mobility disability, they may be at increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 if they need assistance using a mobility device because of the closeness required. Caregivers should take precautions when they are not with the person being cared for to ensure they do not get sick and pass the virus on. Practicing social distancing, wearing a mask properly, and washing hands frequently – even in the absence of the person being cared for, is essential to keeping both people healthy.
- If possible, get a 90-day supply of medications. Having a longer supply of medications means fewer trips to the pharmacy, which lessens possible exposure to the virus. If your pharmacy has drive-thru or delivery options available, try to utilize them.
- Practice social distancing and proper handwashing techniques. It is essential to practice social distancing and other healthy behaviors to keep the caregiver and person being cared for healthy. Caregivers should wash their hands frequently, especially before and after handling their loved one.
- Emotional health, social health, and mental health may be challenged during a pandemic due to the disruption in routine. Not being able to see loved ones and having your routine drastically changed is difficult. To help combat feelings of loneliness, utilize technology such as video calling apps, to stay connected with friends and family. Getting outside and staying active outside of the home can also help fight feelings of loneliness. Social distancing does not mean you cannot enjoy outdoors! Going to a park and staying a safe distance from people can do wonders for your health. Staying active inside at home can also be good for your health. Have a home improvement project you have been wanting to tackle for some time? Now would be the perfect time to get it done.



- Even though these are uncertain times and things change almost daily, maintaining a routine as close to normal will help ease feelings of anxiety. If the person being cared for is used to going to a fitness center for physical activity but cannot because it is closed, switch up the routine by exercising outside. If you can, mimic the activities they are used to doing.
- Check with doctors to find out if offices are doing telehealth appointments. If your loved one is able to utilize virtual health options, consider doing that to limit exposure to multiple people. If telehealth options are not possible, be sure to practice healthy habits like social distancing and wearing a mask when at the doctor's office.
- Since more time will be spent at home due to social distancing, be sure to keep the house stocked with essentials. Things like groceries, cleaning supplies, prescription and over-the-counter medications, entertainment options, etc. will help limit trips. Curbside delivery is a great option many retailers are offering. Utilizing this is great if you cannot get out of the car or leave the person you are caring for alone. Check with your retailer to find out if they offer it and they may even put your items in the trunk of your car.
- If the person you are caring for is unable to communicate or recognize symptoms of illness, staying up-to-date on COVID-19 symptoms is important for the caregiver.
- Make sure the caregiver is healthy. The caregiver should practice social distancing and other healthy habits to minimize their risk of exposure.
- Have a contingency plan. If the caregiver becomes ill or is knowingly exposed to the virus, it is important to have a back-up plan for someone else to provide care. Having things like phone numbers, schedules, and other helpful information listed somewhere in plain sight in the home, will help another caregiver take over seamlessly, if necessary.



## Resources

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-pre-cautions/older-adults.html>
2. [http://committoinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Guidelines-Implementations-Manual\\_final\\_8MB.pdf](http://committoinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Guidelines-Implementations-Manual_final_8MB.pdf)
3. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

To stay up to date on topics like these, visit [www.nchpad.org](http://www.nchpad.org) and [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

