

CAREGIVING TO OLDER ADULTS DURING COVID-19: A GUIDE



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CAREGIVING IS IMPORTANT AND CHALLENGING

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it's become even more so

People aged 60 and older are particularly vulnerable to the disease, especially if they have pre-existing health conditions. While staying home and distancing is the best way to prevent the spread of the disease, it poses challenges to caregivers, both those who live with the senior and those providing care from a distance. As our province moves among the various phases of recovery, restrictions on contact and household bubbles can make providing care difficult, especially when you live in a different zone. It is a serious issue, as one in four Canadians is a caregiver, providing unpaid care to someone who needs help due to a physical or cognitive condition, an injury or a chronic and life-limiting illness.

This guide has two sections:

Resources for seniors

This first section is an overview of resources that can help you care for your older friend or family member during the pandemic. It provides ideas on how you can help them stay active, connected and feeling positive. There are also links to provincial organizations and local and national online resources to support their physical and mental health and help with day-to-day activities.

Help for caregivers

The second section is for caregivers to help you maintain your health and well-being to avoid burnout during this trying time. When you feel good in mind, body and spirit, you are a better caregiver. Caring for yourself isn't selfish. The person you are caring for needs you to be healthy. And self-care doesn't need to be a burden. Just a few minutes a day can make a big difference.

STAY ACTIVE

Even from home, seniors can keep moving to stay healthy

Staying at home is one of the best ways to stop the spread of COVID-19, but it makes it difficult for seniors to get enough exercise, especially if they have mobility or health challenges. Even for seniors with limited mobility, there are creative ways to stay active. The key is to find appropriate and safe exercise to avoid the risk of a fall or injury. If you live with your senior or can visit in-person, consider exercising together. It doesn't need to be a formal class. Even some light yardwork or dancing is beneficial. If you live apart, you can help your senior create a plan and can even make exercising together over a video call a way to stay connected and active together. Before starting any exercise routine, check with their doctor to make sure it's appropriate and safe. Reducing the risk of falls and injury is very important.



Ways to stay active

Walking: Getting in some steps is one of the best things for the body and mind. Mobility and weather permitting, encourage your senior to walk around the yard or neighbourhood. If they must stay indoors, walking around the house or marching in place are good options.

Online videos: There's a wealth of online fitness classes, many free. Gentle stretching exercises such as yoga (including chair yoga) and tai chi are especially beneficial.

Strength training: You don't need a home gym. Many exercises can be done seated or lying down. Click [here](#) to see a few simple moves for seniors that use their body or household items such as soup cans to add weight.

Safety tips



- Wear proper footwear.
- Stay hydrated.
- Exercise on flat surfaces free of tripping hazards.
- Don't overdo it. Take it slow and steady, gradually increasing the fitness routine over time.
- If you don't live with your senior, make sure they let you or someone else know they are exercising in case they fall or hurt themselves.



STAY POSITIVE

There are many ways to maintain good mental health

COVID-19 has been a very stressful time for many older adults, as this age group is particularly vulnerable to the disease. It is natural to feel sadness, stress, grief, and anxiety. There are things you can encourage the senior in your life to do to stay mentally positive.



Create a Routine

In so much uncertainty, a simple daily routine can be a source of stability and comfort and help break up the day. Help the senior in your life create a routine that includes exercise, healthy meals, meaningful activities and socializing.

Relax

Take some time every day for deep breathing, stretching or meditation. There are some excellent free apps, including [Headspace](#) and [Calm](#), if they have internet access.



Avoid Media Overload

It's good to stay informed, but too much news from traditional or social media can be overwhelming.

Enjoy Culture Online

Reading is a great escape. Check out ebooks and audiobooks using your [New Brunswick Library card](#). Or visit a museum virtually: The [Canadian Museum of Nature](#) and the [National Gallery of Canada](#) are two institutions with great online resources.



Plan a Treat

Whether it's something sweet or a plan to play a favourite movie, give your senior little things to look forward to.

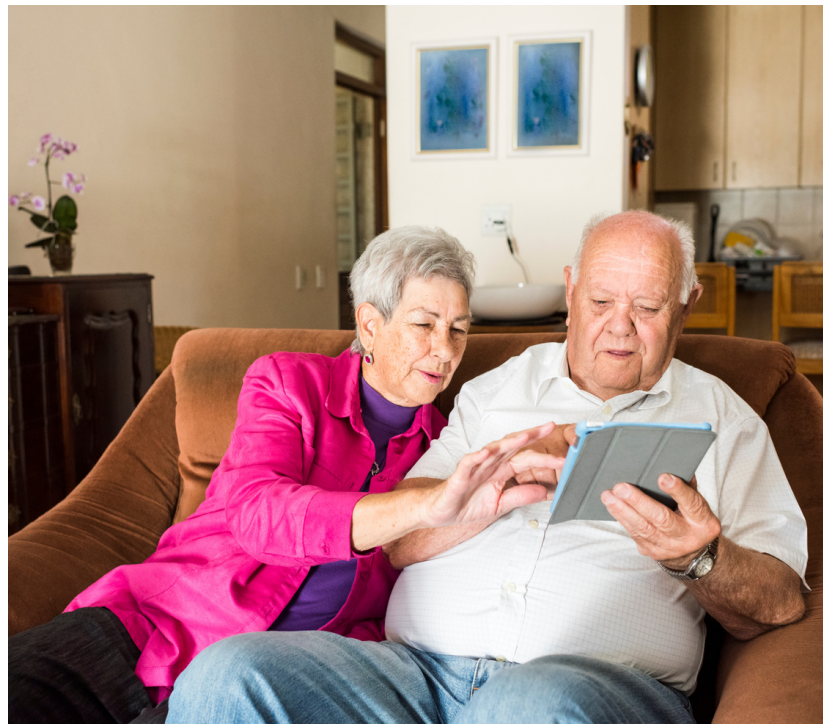
Be Mindful

Staying grounded in the present, rather than fixating on the past or future, can help your loved one stay mentally positive. New Brunswick is offering [MindWell](#), a free resource with daily tips and exercises to boost your senior's mental wellbeing. Why not try the 30-day challenge with them?

STAY CONNECTED

How to keep in touch from a distance

Social isolation is one of the most significant mental health risks during the pandemic. It is linked to depression, poor physical health, and more stress and cognitive changes. As a caregiver, it's essential to help the senior(s) in your life stay connected.



If your senior is online

Meet Them Where They're At:

It can be overwhelming for seniors to learn new platforms and apps. So stick to ones they are comfortable with. Many older adults use Facebook, so video chat with Messenger may be familiar. And some services, including Skype and Zoom, are available in their web browser so they don't have to download the program.

Video Calls: There's nothing like being there, but video calls are the next best thing to an in-person visit. Whether it's on Google Meet, Zoom, FaceTime or other internet-based platforms, these are a great way to connect remotely, whether you're just down the street or out-of-province.



Have a Virtual Family Meal:

Why stop at a conversation? If you can't get together to dine, you can plan to meet online to share mealtime.

Virtual Group Events: Many faith communities, senior centres and community groups have gone virtual. Check with the organizations in your senior's life to see if they have moved their offerings and gatherings online.

If your senior is not online

The phone is a great way to stay in touch. Schedule a regular call time. Invite friends and family to be part of the plan.

Create a call calendar to make sure your loved one has some contact every day. Along with contact with friends, there are services to combat feelings of isolation or loneliness.

The **Canadian Red Cross has a Friendly Calls**

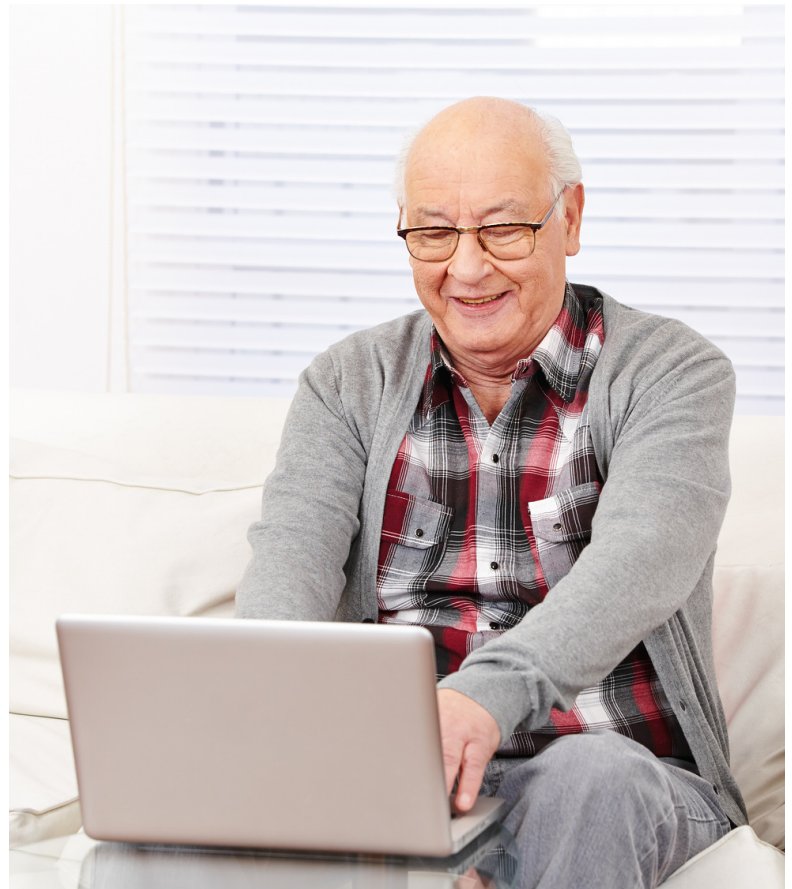
program during COVID-19.

Call 1-833-729-0144 from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., to register your senior for a friendly weekly phone call.

HOW TO GET CONNECTED

Organizations that help seniors get online

There are a number of non-profit organizations that provide free tips and resources to help people, including older adults, access the internet and learn new digital skills and tools.



AbilityNB: This organization can help seniors access donated computers from a national program, [Computers for Schools](#). Contact: 1-866-462-9555, info@abilitynb.ca.

Connected Canadians: Uses a customized, hands-on centred approach to learning. Volunteers with a high comfort level in technology are paired with senior clients. Working together, either one-on-one or in group workshops, clients' various technology challenges are addressed.

Association francophone des aînés du Nouveau-Brunswick: Provides video tutorials for seniors who want to learn more about using online tools such as Zoom. French only. For more, click [here](#). **Public libraries** often provide computer learn-to courses. Contact your local branch for more information.

Neil Squire Society: For seniors with a disability, this organization provides a program to help improve digital literacy. Contact: nb.info@neilsquire.ca, 1-866-446-7999.

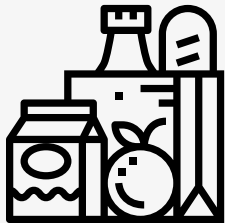
Ability411 answers questions and provides practical information about technologies, tools and equipment that increase independence and well-being for seniors and support their families and care teams (English only).



STAY NOURISHED

Eating well is one of the best ways to stay healthy

If you're not able to visit with your loved one to help them, you can support them by helping to order groceries or arranging for meal deliveries to their home.



Grocery Stores

Many of the major chains and a number of smaller businesses now offer contactless ways to get groceries, including online ordering and delivery, as well as curbside pickup. If you or the senior you care for does need to go to the store, many have dedicated seniors' hours when it's less busy. Check for information online or call your preferred grocer to ask about shopping options.

Takeout

If cooking is a challenge or takeout is a treat, arrange to have a meal delivered. In urban areas, services such as [Skip the Dishes](#) and [Door Dash](#) are a good option for local and chain restaurants.

Community Food Programs

If your senior struggles to pay for healthy food, there are organizations that provide free or low-cost food. The United Way has a [directory](#) of New Brunswick organizations, broken down by county. [Food for All NB](#) has a map of all food programs in the province.



Meals on Wheels

If you cannot prepare your food because you are ill or have a disability, Meals on Wheels can deliver hot or frozen meals. For more information, please contact your local Meals on Wheels provider.

Meal Kits

[HelloFresh](#) and [GoodFood](#) are two meal kit providers with service in New Brunswick. Order online, and they deliver prepped ingredients and recipes to your door.

GETTING THE VACCINE

The risk of severe illness from COVID-19 increases with age

Getting a COVID-19 vaccine is an important step to help protect you and the people around you. The vaccine can reduce your risk of developing the virus and make your symptoms milder if you do get it.

Vaccines work with your immune system, so your body will be ready to fight the virus if you are exposed. A booster shot is administered when a person has completed their initial vaccine series and protection against the virus has decreased over time.

If you have questions about the vaccine or your health conditions, contact your primary healthcare provider.

New Brunswick receives an allocated number of doses of vaccine on a regular basis from the Government of Canada.

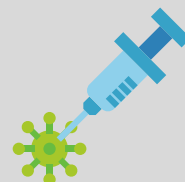
You can find more information about New Brunswick's vaccine strategy, the immunizations (including booster shots) and their availability [here](#). If you want to know how many vaccines have been given, go to the New Brunswick COVID-19 Dashboard [here](#).



Dec. 14, 2020: The first shipment of the vaccine arrives in New Brunswick with 1,950 doses.

HOW TO GET A COVID-19 VACCINE

- Visit the GNB COVID-19 website [here](#) for more information on booking an appointment online for a first dose, second dose or booster of the vaccine. The website also provides details about community walk-in clinics and pharmacies where you can get your dose.
- Ask a family member or friend to help with scheduling an appointment.
- Call your local pharmacy directly to ask about getting your shot.
- If you are homebound, call your primary care provider to ask about getting a referral for a home vaccination. Extra-Mural/Ambulance New Brunswick are providing vaccinations to individuals who are unable to leave their home to go to a pharmacy or regional health authority vaccination clinic. If you're already an extra-mural client, ask about getting assessed to determine if you qualify for this service.





SELF-CARE FOR CAREGIVERS

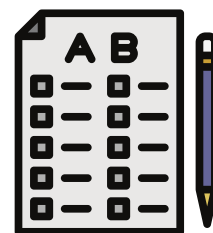
When you feel good in mind, body and spirit, you are a better caregiver

Caring for yourself isn't selfish. The person you are caring for needs you to be healthy. And self-care doesn't need to be a burden. Just a few minutes a day can make a big difference.

CAREGIVER BURNOUT

Caregiving burnout is a state of physical, mental or emotional exhaustion. It can happen at any time, in any caregiver relationship, but the risk increases in times of stress, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even with the help of support services, caregiving to a loved one can be overwhelming. No matter how close you are to that person, you may want to consider including others in the caregiving role.



TAKE THE QUIZ

Fill out the Caregiver Stress Checklist on Page 8 to rate your level of stress. If you answer "sometimes," "often" or "yes" to many of the questions, you might want to consider seeking support. Don't hesitate to reach out for help. If you experience stress reactions for several days in a row and can't handle your everyday responsibilities because of them, contact your health care provider or your [local addictions and mental health centre](#).

TAKE THE STRESS CHECKLIST QUIZ

Sleep	NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALWAYS
I have stressful dreams.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have a hard time getting to sleep.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I wake in the night.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emotional Health	NEVER	SOMETIMES	ALWAYS
Minor upsets make me cry or feel angry or unusually irritated.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have difficulty controlling my temper.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel pressure to hold things together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel hopeless about my situation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical Health	YES	NO	
I have unintentionally gained or lost weight.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I get ill more often than I used to.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I have developed chronic health problems such as backaches, headaches or high blood pressure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Interests	YES	NO	
I have given up hobbies/interests that I used to enjoy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I spend less time with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	



HOW TO PREVENT BURNOUT

There are many things you can do to maintain well-being

Caregiving can quickly become overwhelming and unsustainable. That's why it is so important for you to prioritize your own well-being and practice self-care. Here are some ways to take care of yourself.



Develop Healthy Habits

- Nourish your body with healthy foods. Can't make it to the store? Get your groceries delivered or ask friends, family or neighbours to pick them up for you.
- Get regular exercise. It could be a walk, bike ride, yoga or anything else that gets you moving.

Nurture Your Mental Well-Being

- Try mindfulness exercises such as meditation or creative visualization.
- Practice relaxation techniques, starting with deep breathing.
- Establish a routine and develop a calming ritual to help you unwind at the end of the day.
- Keep a regular sleep schedule.
- Plan little things to look forward to.

Find Support

- Stay connected to and spend time with family, friends and neighbours.
- Ask for and accept help.
- Don't keep problems to yourself. Seek support from family members, friends, other caregivers or a counsellor or therapist.
- Use community resources that support caregivers. See Page 12 for a list of organizations that can help.

Enjoy Hobbies and Recreation

- Use spare moments to listen to your favourite music, radio show or podcast.
- Do things that bring you inner peace, such as taking a walk, gardening or reading.

Stay Positive and Realistic

- Accept what you can't change and focus on what you can influence.
- Use positive self-talk and phrases such as "I can," and "I choose."
- Focus on the good things in your life.
- Practice living in the moment and enjoying life's simpler pleasures.
- Be flexible about plans and expectations.
- Take things one day at a time.
- Set priorities. Don't waste time or energy on unimportant things. Let go of perfectionism.



BE PREPARED FOR COVID-19

It's important to stay informed and know your limits

Keep up to date on COVID-19 through credible sources, but limit how much news you take in. Too much media can impact your mental health. The government websites have clear, current directives on physical distancing, masks and other measures to keep yourself and others safe. Visit the [Government of New Brunswick](#) website for details on staying home when sick, and getting tested if you're symptomatic. Visit the [Government of Canada website](#) for federal information.

Know the Signs and Risks

Get familiar with COVID-19 symptoms. Certain groups, such as older adults and people with chronic diseases, are at a higher risk of developing serious complications from COVID-19. Many caregivers have health issues, so don't put yourself in unnecessary danger. If you're sick, stay home. The government websites have clear, current directives on physical distancing, masks and other measures to keep yourself and others safe. If you think you have symptoms, [click here](#) for directions on what to do.

Have a Plan

Be ready in case you or your loved one gets sick:

- Make a list of important phone numbers and post it in a prominent spot. Include your local public health unit, healthcare provider and close family and friends.
 - Have household supplies and medications for two weeks.
 - Have a back-up plan in case you become ill. Ask family members, friends or neighbours to help if you can't provide care due to illness or quarantine.
 - Write down detailed instructions on how to provide care, including details on medications.
- Prepare for a 14-day quarantine. Can your loved one stay in a specific room, away from other household members? They should also use a separate bathroom, if possible.
 - Pack a bag with essentials in case your senior needs to go to the hospital. Include a set of clothes, personal care items, emergency contact information, important medical information such as medications, and advanced care wishes.

CAREGIVER SUPPORT

Many organizations and programs are there to help

Community Programs

- [Hope for Wellness](#): Immediate mental health counselling and crisis intervention for Canadian Indigenous people.
- [MindWell](#): Free, bilingual website with resources to teach New Brunswickers about mindfulness in action.
- [Alzheimer Society of New Brunswick](#): Information and guidance on support for all caregivers, whether the person you are caring for has dementia or not.
- [CHIMO Helpline](#), 1-800-667-5005: A provincial, 24/7 crisis phone line for New Brunswickers.
- [Ability NB](#): Programs to empower the independence and full community participation of New Brunswickers who have a mobility disability. Call 1-866-462-9555 or email info@abilitynb.ca.
- Red Cross, 1-833-729-0144: Friendly calls if you feel lonely and isolated.
- [211](#): A free, bilingual, confidential phone line to help New Brunswickers navigate services.

Government Programs

- Seniors' Toll-Free Info Line, 1-855-550-0552: Information about N.B. government programs and services for seniors.
- Department of Social Development: 1-833-733-7835: Information on home support, respite or residential care, senior's health and well-being programs.
- [Community Addictions and Mental Health Centres](#): Government of New Brunswick website with a list of resources and contacts.
- [SocialSupportsNB](#): A user-friendly website with information on government and community programs for New Brunswick seniors.



Websites, Apps and Print Resources

- [Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic](#): Centre for Addiction and Mental Health website
- [Living with Worry and Anxiety Amidst Global Uncertainty](#): Psychology Tools downloadable PDF
- [Canadian Mental Health Association of New Brunswick](#): Free webinars and resources for coping with COVID-19
- [Calm](#): Award-winning app for sleep, meditation and relaxation has some free resources
- [Caregiver Webinar Series](#) from the Family Caregiver Alliance
- [Coping with Stress During the COVID-19 Outbreak](#): World Health Organization tip sheet
- [Calming the person with dementia, and yourself](#): A video from Dementia U.K.
- [Virtual Visits Toolkit](#): Guides to using Skype, Zoom and FaceTime from TechCoaches
- [Seniors' Guide to Services and Programs](#): Government of New Brunswick website
- [Caregivers' Guide](#): Government of New Brunswick downloadable PDF
- [Wellness Together Canada](#): Tools and resources
- [Huddol](#): Free online Canadian forum for caregivers
- [Managing Through Covid-19](#): Caregiver tips from the Alzheimer Society of Canada

DISCLAIMER

The information contained within this guide was created from a compilation of sources and is made available to provide a wide range of resources to help older adults and their caregivers stay well at home during COVID-19.

References are provided at the end of the guide for informational purposes only and do not constitute an endorsement of any website or source.

Readers should be aware that the global circumstances around the pandemic are rapidly-changing, and the websites, recommendations and resources listed in this guide may change.

If you have any doubts or have questions about anything you have read, please feel free to reach out for help. Call 211 – a free, bilingual and confidential helpline for New Brunswickers to find support such as housing, food access, mental health services and more – or the Seniors' Toll-Free Info Line at 1-855-550-0552. You may also reach out directly to the Department of Social Development at 1-833-733-7835.



SOURCES

Regional Geriatric Program of Toronto

<https://www.rgptoronto.ca/>

Active Living Coalition for Older Adults

<https://www.activeagingcanada.ca/assets/pdf/healthy-living/Daily-Dose-Brochure.pdf>

Sunnybrook Geriatric Day Hospital

<https://youtu.be/ZFOxPI6rU9I>

Canadian Red Cross

https://www.redcross.ca/crc/documents/What-We-Do/Preparing-for-and-Coping-with-Effects-of-Disaster_2018_v2.pdf

APS Psychology and Aging Interest Group Committee of The Australian Psychological Society Limited

https://www.psychology.org.au/getmedia/5f9cc6d4-ad5c-4b02-8b7f-d4153cb2ba2b/20APS-IS-COVID-19-Public-Older-adults_1.pdf

Alberta Health Services

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-19-seniors-wellness-in-challenging-times.pdf>

Canadian Frailty Network

<https://www.cfn-nce.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Tip-Sheet-Avoid-Social-Isolation-WITH-Technology-1.pdf>
<https://www.cfn-nce.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Tip-Sheet-Avoid-Social-Isolation-WITHOUT-Technology-1.pdf>

Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health

<https://ccsmh.ca/resources/covid-19-resources/>

Ottawa Public Health

https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/Older_Adults_and_COVID-19.aspx