OLDER ADULTS' WELLNESS DURING COVID-19: A GUIDE

New Nouveau Brunswick

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STAY SAFE AND AGE WELL

Taking care of your mental and physical health is especially important during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought changes to the way we live and how we can interact with our communities, friends and even families. It has brought many stresses and highlighted the importance of taking care of both your physical and mental health to stay well.

For older adults, the risk of developing serious complications from the virus is greater than for other people, particularly if they have existing health conditions.

The most effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is to stay home and physically distance yourself from others. This can lead to feelings of social isolation and loneliness.

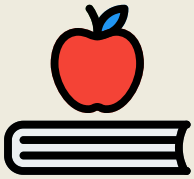
Guide provides roadmap to wellness

This guide is a toolkit to help older adults stay at home and remain independent, resilient, and feel connected to loved ones and communities during these challenging times. It provides tips about how you can take care of your mental and physical health.

Just a few small changes to your daily routine can make a big difference in how you feel.

The guide gives suggestions about how to create an action plan in case you need to self-isolate or become ill. Having a plan could ease your worry and anxiety about COVID-19.

You aren't alone, and this guide presents options for help when you need it.



STAY ACTIVE

Even from home, older adults can keep moving to stay healthy

If you cannot leave your home because of illness, disability or public health measures linked to the pandemic, there are options to remain active in your home.

According to the Regional Geriatric Program of Toronto, older adults can lose one to five per cent of muscle mass each day when they aren't physically active.

It's important to check with your doctor before starting any new exercise routine to be safe.

Ways to stay active

Body breaks: stand up at commercial breaks or after a book chapter.

Move every 30 mins: slowly lift your arms as far over your head as possible and back down.

Daily dose of exercise: walk to the store or take the stairs.

Add more stretching, lifting and tapping to your daily list of activities.

Get outside once a day: go for a walk or sit on the porch.

Equipment Loan Service

If you're a senior with a disability and would like to access adaptive equipment – multisport wheelchairs, handcycles, boccia & bowling ramps, hockey sledges, sit skis, racing chairs and more – you can contact Ability New Brunswick at 1-866-462-9555 or info@abilitynb.ca.

STAY POSITIVE

Just minutes a day can make a big difference in how you feel

It's normal to feel stress, anxiety, grief and worry during and after a challenging situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking care of your emotional health will help you think clearly and help you to protect yourself and others.

Tips to manage stress:

Maintain social connection: phone or text those closest to you or use video-based technology to check-in with people.

Learn the facts but limit media exposure: take breaks from media coverage and limit conversation about COVID-19.

Take precautions and keep things in perspective: ask yourself what the important facts are to remember and if you are overestimating the bad consequences.

Stay active.

Check in with yourself. It's ok not to be ok. Ask for help when you need it.

When to get help

If you have any of these feelings for more than two weeks, you may need support:

- Feelings of anxiety, despair, intense sadness, hopelessness or guilt,
- Outbursts of anger,
- Difficulty eating or sleeping,
- Lost interest in activities that were enjoyable,
- Physical symptoms such as headaches or stomach aches,
- Avoiding family and friends,
- Increased alcohol or drug abuse.

How to get help

Call 211 – this free helpline puts you in touch with community supports.

Bridge the gapp – provides online support for mental health at your fingertips.

Canadian Mental Health Association – offers free webinars, workshops and support groups.

Chimo Helpline – this crisis phone line is accessible 24 hours a day at 1-800-667-5005.

Contact your primary health provider or your local addictions and mental health centre.

Tele-Care 811 can connect you with a Mobile Crisis Unit in your area.

Call 911 – If you're in crisis and in need of immediate medical support, call for help.

STAY CONNECTED

To avoid feeling isolated while staying home, there are things you can do to feel better

Tips to avoid social isolation:

- Call friends and family.
- Go outside at least once a day.
- Listen to music.
- Read a book or magazine
- Spend time doing a hobby.
- Get creative: paint, write or draw,
- Cook or bake.
- Create a to-do list and then do one item on it.
- Research and create your family tree.
- Order from your favourite restaurant.
- Do a puzzle, Sudoku or a crossword.
- Meditate.

Making new connections

Peer Support/Rehabilitation Counselling Programs

Are you an older adult with a disability and would like to receive peer support or access a rehabilitation counsellor who can help create a plan that meets your life needs? Contact Ability New Brunswick at 1-866-462-9555 or info@abilitynb.ca.

For information on Ability NB and its programs, click here.

Friendly Calls Program

Are you or a loved one feeling isolated or lonely? Contact the Canadian Red Cross at 1-833-729-0144 Monday to Friday to register for the Friendly Calls Program.

Red Cross volunteers will arrange to call you at regular, mutually agreed times in English or French. For more information on the Friendly Calls Program, click here.

CONNECT ONLINE

While physically distancing, we can still video chat and access online resources

Avoiding isolation with a smartphone/device:

- **Video chat with friends and family** with platforms such as Skype, FaceTime or Zoom.
- **Visit the New Brunswick Public Library online** here to download eBooks and audiobooks.
- **Exercise.** To try a workout from the National Institute on Aging, click here.
- **Stream a TV show or movie** using Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, or Crave TV.
- **Create your family tree** with Ancestry.ca or Family Search.com (free) are available for research.
- **Visit a museum online**.
- **Do a crossword or Sudoku online**. Click here to get the Washington Post daily crossword or here for Sudoku.
- **Stream a podcast** from Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, or platforms like iHeartRadio.
- **Try a new recipe online and then video chat** during a "shared" meal.
- **Meditate**. For meditations, click here.
- **Volunteer over the phone or online.** Contact an organization like Volunteer Greater Moncton, Connect Fredericton, Greater Saint John Volunteer Connector, Volunteer Centre of Charlotte County, or local Red Cross.

Need help to get online?

- Ability NB: helps seniors access donated computers from a national program, Computers for Schools. Contact Ability NB at 1-866-462-9555 or info@abilitynb.ca.
- Neil Squire Society: helps seniors with a disability improve digital literacy. Contact nb.info@neilsquire.ca or call 1-866-446-7999.
- Association francophone des aînés du Nouveau-Brunswick: provides video tutorials for seniors who want to learn more about online tools such as Zoom (French only.)
- Public libraries often provide computer learn-to courses.
- Connected Canadians: Volunteers are paired with senior clients. Working together, either one-on-one or in group workshops, clients' various technology challenges are addressed.
- Ability411 answers questions and provides information about technologies and equipment that increase independence and well-being for seniors (English only.)

MAKE A PLAN

Creating a plan in case of illness or quarantine will allow you to stay home more comfortably

How to prepare yourself for illness or quarantine:

- Make a plan to check in regularly with family members, friends and neighbours to stay connected by phone or video chat.
- Keep a two-week supply of canned or frozen foods, pet supplies, hygiene items and cleaning supplies.
- Refill prescription medications regularly and keep a supply of over-the-counter meds.
- Ensure cellphones and electronic devices are charged.
- Discuss your plan with loved ones.
- Create a list of emergency contacts and keep in an accessible place.
- If you have chronic health conditions, keep a list of your current medical conditions, treatments and health care providers.
- If you think you have symptoms, click here for directions on when to get tested and stay at home.
- Download the COVID Alert app.

Know the symptoms of COVID-19

Educate yourself about COVID-19 symptoms so you can identify them if you or someone close to you becomes sick. Government websites have current information on physical distancing, masks and other measures to keep you and others safe.

To access the Government of New Brunswick COVID-19 website, click here. For more information about Coronavirus for seniors and families, click here.

For up-to-date information on the pandemic from the Government of Canada, click here.

GETTING THE VACCINE

Older adults will be among the first to receive immunizations against COVID-19

Older New Brunswickers are part of the Stage 1 priority group to receive the vaccine between December 2020 and March 2021 with long-term care residents and staff, health care workers with direct patient contact, and adults in First Nations communities.

The COVID-19 vaccine prevents infection and decreases the severity of infection.

Health Canada has approved two vaccines, the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, for use. More could come in the future as well, including the Oxford vaccine. As Health Canada approves additional vaccines, N.B. will get doses.

Both of the approved vaccines are given by injection into the muscle of the shoulder and require two doses. For the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, the second dose is given 21-28 days after the first. The Moderna vaccine's second dose is administered 28 days later.

More information on New Brunswick's vaccine strategy, the immunizations and the rollout can be found here. If you want to know how many vaccines have been given, visit the GNB COVID-19 Dashboard.

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

Vaccine rollout plan in New Brunswick

Stage 1
Dec. 2020 - Mar. 2021

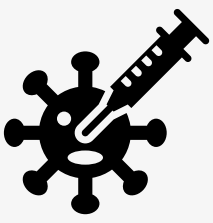
- Older New Brunswickers
- Long-term care residents and staff
- Health care workers with patient contact
- Adults in Indigenous communities

Stage 2
Spring 2021

- Residents and staff of other communal settings (homeless shelters, correctional facilities, etc.)
- Other health care workers, including pharmacists
- First responders and critical infrastructure workers (power, water and sewer, etc.)

Stage 3
Spring/Summer 2021

- Vaccine to be more widely available



STAY NOURISHED

Eating well will help you feel your best during these challenging times

The goal is to be prepared so that you have food on hand in case you need to self-isolate, become ill or have to limit your trips to the grocery store. Buying extra items can take place gradually.

Staple foods with a longer shelf life:

- Frozen or canned meat, fish, soup, stews, fruit and vegetables.
- Grains: rice, couscous, quinoa, bread, tortillas, pasta, cold dry and hot cereals and crackers.
- Carrots, parsnips, turnips, potatoes, cabbage.
- Apples, melon, oranges and grapefruit.
- Canned and dried beans, seeds, nut butters.
- Non-refrigerated milk and plant-based beverages.
- Flour, oil, butter or margarine, coffee, tea, hot chocolate, jam, honey, sugar, granola bars.
- Meal replacements like Boost or Ensure.

Helpful hints for buying groceries

Before doing your shopping, check the Canada Food Guide here for healthy eating options for older adults.

Some areas have group-buying programs that offer groceries at a cheaper price. Food for All NB has a map of all the food programs in the province, found here. Contact your local food bank, the United Way, Community Inclusion Network or other community organization for information.

If you need groceries, medications or other essential items, you can also ask a family member or friend you trust to pick it up for you and leave it on your doorstep to minimize contact.

GETTING FOOD

Take advantage of the many options to buy food safely and have it delivered to your home

Many grocery stores offer special food services for seniors. Check for information online or call your preferred grocer to ask about shopping options.

Some of these specialized services include:

- Special hours for seniors who can do their shopping at a time that's less busy.
- Online ordering, curbside pickup (free or low cost) and delivery services (often has a fee)
- Dieticians who can assist with meal plans, help people understand food labels and provide other food-related services over the phone.

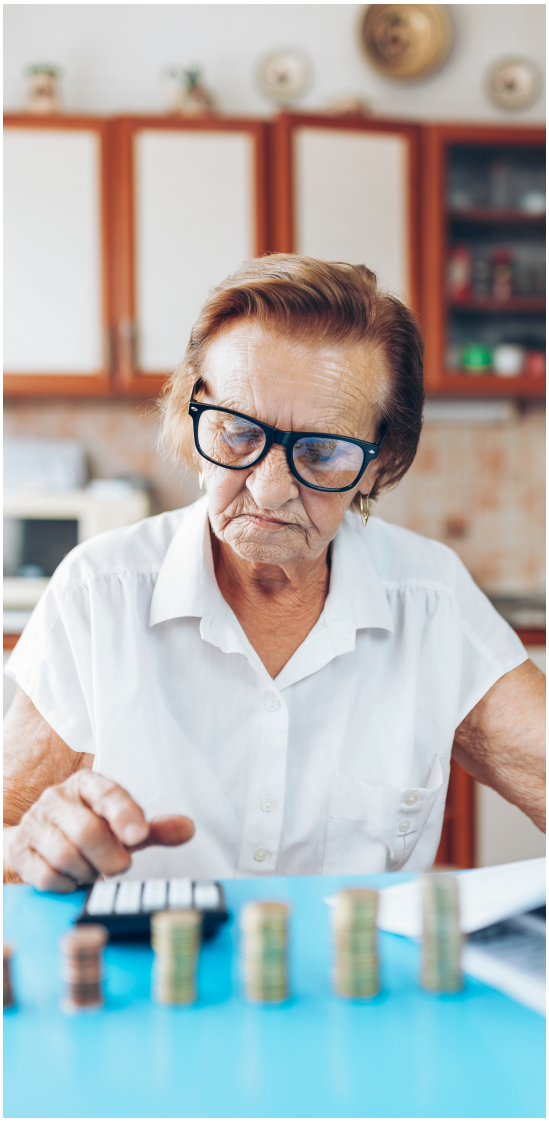
211: Call this free, bilingual and confidential helpline to find supports – from basic needs such as housing and food access to mental health services and more – in the community.

Meals delivered right to your door

Meals on Wheels: If you cannot prepare your own food because you are ill or have a disability, Meals on Wheels can deliver meals – hot or frozen – to your home. Click here for a list of providers.

Meal Kits: HelloFresh and GoodFood are two Canadian meal services. Order online and they'll deliver prepped ingredients and recipes to your door.

Takeout: Order from your favourite restaurants over the phone or online via the restaurant's website. In urban areas, order using an online application such as Door Dash or Skip The Dishes.



GETTING NEEDED FINANCIAL HELP

COVID-19 has hit some people hard and there's assistance for those who need it

Government initiatives to help older adults:

- **New Brunswick Low-Income Seniors' Benefit**: The province provides $400 per year to eligible people who are 60 years or older.
- **Emergency Fuel Benefit**: You may qualify for help if you can't afford to heat your home.
- **New Brunswick Seniors' Home Renovation Tax Credit**: You can claim up to $10,000 in renovations to make your home safer.
- **Registered Retirement Income Funds**: Ottawa has reduced minimum withdrawals.
- **One-time tax-free payment**: A federal benefit to help seniors cover costs caused by COVID-19.

Other resources

- **211:** A free, bilingual, confidential phone line to help New Brunswickers navigate community, social, non-clinical health and government services for everyday needs and times of crisis.
- **Seniors' Toll-Free Info Line**, 1-855-550-0552: Information about New Brunswick government programs and services for seniors.
- **Department of Social Development** contact 1-833-733-7835: Information on home support, respite or residential care, or seniors' health and well-being programs.
- **Social Supports NB:** A user-friendly website with information on social programs in New Brunswick. The site currently focuses on seniors.

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.

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