



Ten Coping Strategies for older Oregonians during COVID-19

Communities + Generations + Innovations



Plan Now for the Worst

Of course you are worried. You are constantly being reminded your personal risk is higher due to your age. Every day brings its sad news. What will you do if you or your partner gets sick and needs medical care? If you live alone, who can help?

One way to gain a sense of control in turbulent days is to prepare now for what might happen if.... An emergency plan *now* will allow you to do what needs to be done *then*.

Create a personal support network, or Circle of Care

American Red Cross advice starts with the concept of "a personal support network" made up of several individuals who will check in on you in an emergency, to ensure your wellness and to give assistance if needed. This idea in a Circle of Care means you are doing things for others while they do the same for you. It is an old idea updated from the mutual aid societies common in the 19th century. A network, or Circle of Care, can consist of friends, roommates, family members, relatives, personal attendants, co-workers and neighbors. Ideally, a minimum of three people make up your personal network.

Things you can discuss and implement with your personal support network:

- Make arrangements to check on each other regularly and, if needed, offer assistance.
- Collect relevant emergency documents, phone numbers, DHS contact person, relatives' phone numbers and place them near the front door in a labeled envelope or box.
- Agree on and practice methods for contacting each other in an emergency.
- Post the names and contact phone numbers of others in your circle on the refrigerator door where they can be found easily.
- You and your personal support network should notify others if you go out of town and when you will return.

Remember your relationships should be mutual. Everyone contributes as they are able. For more ideas about how this might work for you, see this at AGE+

Look ahead for what might be involved

The Centers for Disease Control offers a checklist of how to care for a household member if they become sick with COVID-19. Walking through these steps before they are needed may help you envision your role as caretaker, what you might need, and how you should evaluate the person's status.

As the number of COVID-19 cases peak, the wait times for medical advice from your provider could be long. You may need to take initiative as you wait for counsel.

For Your Family and Friends: Create A Love Folder

What will make it easier on your children and friends if you need live elsewhere for a time? What would you like them to know if there should come a time when you cannot speak?

Let's start with those special things you know about family that other people may not know. Describe or photograph special toys, blankets, clothes that provided comfort when they were young ones. Remember trips. Describe your own parents. Mention television shows or regular activities the family enjoyed.

Borrow the idea from an ICU nurse in Seattle who is making a [video scrapbook](#) of stories for her two year old son, knowing that she is a particular risk.

If you are caring for grandchildren, disclose the children's favorite and hated foods, allergy information and any special circumstances. Two examples: "I promised my grandson he would never have to eat tomatoes." "My niece is allergic to peanuts." Share parenting insights you learned, such as: "_____ type of behavior is triggered when _____ happens because of _____."

[Here](#) are more ideas for you can do now to prepare for an unplanned separation from your home.

Consider a grab bag by the door

If you or a loved one needs to be admitted to the hospital, you'll need to pack everything you might want for the duration of the stay. Here's a [suggested packing list](#) from AdventHealth:

Absolute Must-Have Items

- Phone and charger for phone and electronics
- Toiletries: hairbrush, hair ties, moisturizer, lotion, lip balm
- Loose, warm, comfortable clothing (hospitals are kept chilly to ward off germs)

Consider these items

- List of medications
- PJs, slippers, flip flops, socks and underwear
- Earplugs and earphones
- Comforting entertainment options such as iPad, books or magazines
- Religious texts

Another planning ahead tool that might help is the [Red Cross disaster preparedness booklet](#) especially for seniors.

Make sure your end-of-life documents are up to date

It's not a pleasant topic, but dealing with end-of-life issues when you are well will take an enormous burden off your loved ones should an emergency arise. [For Oregon residents](#), find information about health care representatives, and a form to designate someone to make health decisions for you if needed. Many hospitals now keep advanced directives in a patient's medical records if you ask. But you should also share copies with friends and family members and keep a copy in your digital or home files.

Tough stuff, alright. But waiting could make your wishes much, much harder to fulfill. Harder for you and your family.