

# Staying Heart Healthy during COVID-19

It's an uncertain time. This pandemic has touched us all. We, at THC, would like to remind you that we are here to support you and are working on bringing cardiac rehab and prevention strategies to you, even at a distance.

The risk factors that make us more likely to have a future heart attack also put us at higher risk for a severe COVID infection. We understand that developing healthy habits might not be at the top of your list right now. However, there is no time better than the present to focus on your health and practices.

**Deal with Stress** – This is a stressful time, but choosing healthy coping mechanisms, will help you feel better in the moment. You might be tempted to reach for a cigarette, drink more alcohol, snack while watching TV, or eat unhealthy comfort food. Be aware of your unhealthy habits and substitute these with healthy activities like planning meals, deep cleaning your home, cleaning up your backyard for spring, or walking a pet outdoors. Involve your children or grandchildren and teach them (if virtually or over the phone) while you're at it! Add more self-care into your life – that is to say, it's ok to make yourself a priority. Be on the lookout for opportunities to practice simple self-care, learn deep breathing techniques, practice being mindful, or meditate. (See Mental Health Document)

**Understand the facts** – We all want to stay informed about the pandemic. Increasing your knowledge and awareness promotes calm in some and stress in others. Look for the facts and only credible and relevant opinions. Try not to get too obsessed with the news, though – this can lead to increased anxiety. If you do want to watch or read the news, set aside a fixed time – preferably not at the end of the day when it's time to unwind.

**Embracing the physical distancing** – Instead of thinking about physical distancing as a punishment, think of it as much needed tranquil break from the fast-paced world. There are pros and cons of physical distancing; this is an opportunity to get more involved in your community. You can do things you didn't have time for before. Stay connected with your friends and family by scheduling conference calls or phone calls, do online courses to upskill yourself, refurbish, and accessorize your home, and spend time on hobbies you enjoy.

**Eat right** – Even though it is harder to get groceries, it is more important now than ever to plan your meals carefully. Make a routine; don't grab chips and cookies when you're hungry, and don't use your fridge as a door to open often. Use our Diet and Losing Weight guide (See Diet and Losing Weight) to plan heart-healthy meals and maybe even find new recipes to try!

**Lose weight** - It is possible to continue your weight loss journey even while indoors! Plan low-fat meals, fill half your plate with salads or frozen vegetables, and schedule 30-minute physical activities in a calendar. Weigh yourself and check your waist circumference once a week and write it down. Even if you're not losing as much weight as you were before, if you're in the right direction, you will eventually get there. (See Food and Losing Weight Document)

**Stay active** - It is possible to stay active during this time! The good weather is on our side. Get off the couch and choose activities like gardening, walking up and down the stairs, cleaning the house, and even standing and cooking healthy food for an hour. Try to stand up for a few minutes after 30 minutes of sitting. Stand more while doing activities such as talking on the phone, folding laundry, and using your computer. Use the step counter while walking and set a step goal for yourself. It may not be your ideal workout, but it's an excellent way to start easing into or maintaining an active lifestyle. (See Activity Document)

**Don't Forget your Medications** – During COVID, it's not as easy to get last-minute refills. Keep a list of your medications and check when your refills are due, at least a week in advance, will help manage everyone's time and allow you to go to the pharmacy when it's less crowded. Many pharmacies deliver with notice. Take stock of your medications and organize them in a pill organizer. Mark a calendar and talk to your doctor/pharmacy about refills well in advance.

**Monitor, but don't Over-Monitor your Blood Pressure** – If you have a home monitor, it is a good idea to check your blood pressure a few times a week and write it down. If there's a concern, doctors are available even virtually for advice on blood pressure control. (See Hypertension Document)

## **Links**

[Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

[COVID-19: Mental Health and Well-Being](#)