

**Letter to editor**

**Self-management for elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic**

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**Keywords:** Self-management; self-care, elderly; COVID-19; pandemic; older people.

*Bangladesh Journal of Medical Science Vol. 20 No. 03 July'21. Page : 694-695  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3329/bjms.v20i3.52820>*

**Source of fund: (if any).** The authors did not get any funding for the preparation of this article. The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare that there is no possible conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

**Ethical clearance: Not applicable.**

**Authors' contribution:** All the authors have contributed equally to drafting and revising the manuscript. They have approved the final version for publication.

Although all age groups are at the risk of contracting SARS- CoV-2 – also referred as coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19), it is a major threat to elderly people for developing severe illness and mortality following infection, due to their underlying comorbid conditions.<sup>1</sup>

As SARS-CoV-2 has high transmissibility from person-to-person,<sup>1</sup> in many countries, restrictions have been placed to visit elderly homes. The second wave of COVID-19 has become more dreadful and World Health Organization has warned about the third wave. The effectiveness of the vaccines for the older age group is questionable.<sup>2</sup> The number of hospital admission has increased dramatically, and people worldwide face unprecedented difficulties in seeking healthcare facilities, which can increase the severity of existing diseases.<sup>3-4</sup> Therefore, the elderly

people might be self-isolated for a very long time to protect them. However, the lack of social contact may have adverse consequences, as they are vulnerable to mental health issues including fear, stress, anxiety, mood disorders, and depression; and these issues can also heighten their risk for cardiovascular, autoimmune, and neurocognitive disorders.<sup>5</sup>

Older people can benefit from the following seven steps of self-management practices amid this devastating pandemic:

Firstly, strictly follow the safeguard procedures of their country, practice social distancing and staying home; wearing masks if coughing or sneezing; escape social gathering; frequently handwashing with soap or alcohol-based hand rub; and avoiding handshaking to prevent COVID-19 infection.<sup>6-7</sup>

Secondly, maintaining a balanced diet to boost the natural immune system will help to prepare themselves better if they do become infected with COVID-19.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, since smokers are more susceptible to infectious diseases including serious COVID-19, older people should stop smoking.

Thirdly, in a lockdown situation where people develop a more sedentary lifestyle, exercise is essential for self-care as it can keep someone fit and healthy both psychically and mentally.<sup>6,9</sup>

Fourth, indulging oneself to their favourite pastime and hobbies such as reading books or listening to audiobooks, watching television series or movies, and listening to music have been widely accepted

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to promote mood, health well-being and quality of life.<sup>6,9</sup> However, older people should limit watching, reading, or listening to frequent and repeated news on current pandemic situation.

Fifth, religious activities like prayer, meditation, and reading religious literature have a significant positive impact on both physical and mental health; therefore, religious activities are important to reduce stress during self-isolation.<sup>9</sup>

Sixth, plenty of sleep (7-8 hours per night) is also highly encouraged to reduce the chance of negative consequences of COVID-19 quarantine.

Seven, older people can be psychologically benefited through regular contacts, such as phone calls or video chats, with family members and close friends. Thanks to the available technology that has made people just a call away. Family support plays a proactive role in older people's physical and mental well-being,<sup>10</sup> which can reduce any negative consequences amidst the pandemic.

While isolating elderly is to mitigate the transmission, promoting healthy life-style and self-management measures are vital to their physical and mental well-being.

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