



# AGING TODAY “Lean on Me” in this time of uncertainty

By Bob Roth, Managing Partner of Cypress HomeCare Solutions

**It's hard to believe that it's been just a little more than a month (February 29) since the Coronavirus claimed its first life here in our great nation. It seems much longer, doesn't it? Since this time we have been bombarded with a lot of negative news via the news articles, cable news shows we consume and through all of this we have all become self-taught epidemiology experts. We are learning a lot of new medical terminology; new acronyms like PPE (personal protective equipment), and words like asymptomatic (not showing symptoms), as we drink from a fire hose about this pandemic.**

Make no mistake this pandemic is an equal opportunity offender, and this is serious, with the elderly being the most vulnerable. I don't want to minimize the risks that are associated with this horrible virus. With all this uncertainty in the world thanks to the virus, there is no better time than now to show the world the power of our great nation, and that power lies with us the people of the United States of America.

During this stay at home mandate, for those of us that are fortunate to have a family or partner to spend time with this is a great chance for us to get to closer with our family members, partners and roommates. So many of us that are living alone and at a time like this that can make for an extremely lonely existence. Did you know that approximately 33% of our elderly population (65+) lives home alone? According to Joseph Coughlin and the MIT Age Lab this number may eclipse the 50% mark over the next 15 years. Loneliness is where our biggest challenge lies with this pandemic, and with our older adult population this can be extremely dangerous. How do we keep them engaged? How do we ensure they getting what they need? The Center of Disease Control (CDC) urges that we all practice self-isolation and social distancing to protect ourselves. However, this same isolation that could save the elderly from coronavirus could have the complete opposite effect. A 2015 study found

that prolonged isolation can have the same effect as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

The emphasis for social distancing should be centered on the word “social.” How do we keep our aging loved ones engaged? So many are feeling socially disconnected.

Here are 9 things you can do to keep your aging loved ones, neighbors and friends from feeling and being isolated.

## 1. Help with keeping them social engaged

Check in with them regularly. If they are adapt to using technology; let me suggest using video conferencing like FaceTime or Zoom, sending them text messages or emails. Sometimes nothing beats the old-fashioned picking up the phone and engaging them in a phone call regularly. If you're cooking, make a little extra and offer a dish to them; put it in a disposable container, use a disinfectant wipe to sanitize the outside of the container, and leave a thoughtful note.

## 2. Help with food and essentials

Lots of nonperishable items have disappeared from stores, especially hand sanitizers and toilet paper. Consider shopping for them while doing your own or help them set up a revolving delivery from the grocery store.

## 3. Help with medications

Offer to pick up their prescriptions or better yet set up ongoing delivery, in some cases you can order your prescriptions in 90-day quantities to eliminate the need to worry about running out. The latter might require a three-way call to the drug store, and maybe a follow-up call to their health insurance. Many of our seniors have trouble remembering to take medications; you can ask the pharmacy to pre-package medications in blister packs with designations for morning and evening.



You can also call to remind them to take their medications.

#### **4. Help with health care appointments**

It is amazing how many medical practices have embracing the use of either phone or video conference appointments (telehealth). In this time like this pandemic, it's a safe way to visit. Particularly if you are a family member, or have power of attorney for medical decision-making, you could participate in these appointments. Should the older person urgently need an in-person evaluation, phone ahead for them, report symptoms and ask for instructions as to next steps.

#### **5. Engage the grandchildren**

With school closed for the time being, your children could help an older adult learn something new about today's technology, whether it be a laptop or a TV remote. Or they might send emails to grandparents or elderly neighbors to chat about what they're doing, or ask them to participate online in virtual classrooms, symphonies or museums. Best of all: Your children could use this time to record some family history.

#### **6. Connect with trusted organizations**

Remote-volunteer for local organizations serving older adults. Many of these agencies, stretched thin, may prefer financial support. Many provide meals for seniors, and most of those are providing home delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Consider helping out by purchasing pre-paid gas cards to support the drivers.

#### **7. For dementia care partners**

If you know someone caring for a person with dementia, reach out to them. Many of them occasionally use adult day care, but during this outbreak, these facilities are now unavailable. Any support groups they normally attend might not be in session either. The lack of services may increase their stress. So assist

them by setting up phone or video conferencing with other dementia care partners to strategize on ways to cope.

#### **8. Encourage activity**

While some of our aging loved ones are isolated in their own homes does not preclude them from moving. If they are watching television, get up during every commercial on TV and do an active chore or if possible, taking a walk outside is a great way to stay active and enjoy the benefits of fresh air and sunshine.

#### **9. Go on a news diet**

Stay informed, know what's going on but don't get locked into endlessly watching "breaking news" on the 24-hour news channels. Typically, not much changes hour to hour. But enduring the repetitious pummeling from TV all day long can bring needless anxiety. Watch a news update in the morning, then check in again at night. Don't stay with it all evening — 30 minutes or an hour is plenty.

Music is a powerful way to elicit positive emotions. Help grandchildren or neighbors make playlists that resonate with them. With the unfortunate passing of music legend Bill Withers last week, I can't help but feel that his hit "Lean on Me" is a great tribute for how we need to come together to help lift up our family, friends, neighbors and community. We are all in this together and together we will beat this virus. So please stay at home, connect with your loved ones, social distance, wash your hands and if everyone does their part we can surely blunt the virus curve and get through to the other side when life can get back to some semblance of normal again.

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