

# MENTAL HEALTH OF THE ELDERLY DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

## How can the COVID-19 outbreak affect the mental health of the elderly?

The outbreak of COVID-19 could lead to greater levels of stress in the elderly, as a result of being more at risk of the infection. It could also lead to increased feelings of isolation, especially if they are already experiencing conditions like widowhood, limited mobility etc. Loneliness can increase the risk for depression and anxiety. Those who rely on social contact out of their homes are even more vulnerable to mental health concerns.

## What issues pertaining to COVID-19 affect the mental health of the elderly more than other age groups?

- Difficulty in accessing help, support, and resources as care-givers are unable to travel and meet them.
- Difficulty in connecting with others through social media and technology such as mobile phones, skype, Zoom etc.
- For those who have health complications and age-related disabilities, any disruptions in access to ongoing constant medical care due to the pandemic may affect their mental health too.

## What are some signs of mental health concerns in the elderly during this time?

We might observe a range of mental health concerns including:

- Boredom and disturbances in sleep, appetite, and eating.
- Worry and anxiety related to death, dying, illness, and uncertainty about the future.
- Hopelessness and/or helplessness.
- Sadness, loss of interest, low levels of motivation and energy.

In some cases, mental health concerns can develop into clinical disorders. It is particularly important to pay attention to signs of depression and anxiety-related disorders at this time.

## What are some signs of depression in the elderly?

Symptoms of depression in the elderly might manifest differently than those in younger people. For example, instead of sadness, one might feel increasingly tired. The following changes may be signs of depression:

- **Physical signs:** Tiredness, difficulty in sleeping, and changes in appetite.
- **Mood disturbances:** Grumpiness, irritability, and anger.
- **Cognitive signs:** Confusion, memory, and attention problems. Thoughts of dying/suicide. Neglecting personal care.

## What can I do to help the elderly at home showing such symptoms?

The following steps can help the mental well-being of the elderly:

- Doing activities together, like looking at old photos, listening to music, or playing a game.
- Ensuring that there are enough small chores that they can be part of, and can contribute to.
- Helping them reconnect with others using technology.
- A regular schedule of exercise, and exercising together.
- Reassurance and validation of mental health concerns as a result of the pandemic.

In the presence of mental health concerns of greater severity, one might not be able to utilize typically healthy coping mechanisms. In such instances and in the absence of support, it is strongly recommended to reach out for professional support.

## When should one get professional help?

The answer depends on many factors:

- **Duration and course of mental health concerns:** Have symptoms of depression been around for a while? How has the person been able to cope with concerns so far? Do they have access to support? In some cases, we might see mental health concerns suddenly worsening as a result of the pandemic.

- **Severity of concerns:** Concerns that are present most of the day, every day, might indicate greater severity. One also needs to look for signs of risk. This would include increased thoughts of dying, and not wanting to be alive.
- **Motivation for self-care:** Due to mental health concerns, one may not be able to access motivation to change or engage in self-care.

Notes:

1. These responses were first published on the Indian Scientists' Response to CoViD-19 (ISRC) website.
2. Source of the image used in the background of the article title: <https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/quarantine-for-old-people-gm1219512973-356745103>.

**Indian Scientists' Response to CoViD-19 (ISRC)** is a group of more than 500 Indian scientists, engineers, technologists, doctors, public health researchers, science communicators, journalists and students who voluntarily came together in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This group can be contacted at [indscicov@gmail.com](mailto:indscicov@gmail.com).



# WILL CONSUMING DATURA PREVENT SARS-CoV-2 INFECTION?

SNIPPETS

The *Datura stramonium* shrub is widely distributed in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. The fact that it has spherical, prickly fruit (and is, therefore, also known as thorn apple) that resembles SARS-CoV-2 with its spike protein is only a coincidence. There is no evidence to suggest that the plant or any of its parts have antiviral properties.

Parts of the Datura plant are rich in compounds (known as tropane alkaloids) that are used as medication for

motion sickness, and low blood pressure (caused by a slow heart rate). But these compounds have many adverse effects. Not only are they hallucinogenic (causing people to hear or see things that are not real), they can cause disorientation, and a rapid, irregular heartbeat (which can be fatal). In fact, consuming these compounds, parts of the Datura plant, or the plant as a whole without the advice of a doctor can be fatal.

Notes:

1. This response was first published on the Indian Scientists' Response to CoViD-19 (ISRC) website.
2. Source of the image used in the background of the article title: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/99758165@N06/18652364948>. Credits: NY State IPM Program at Cornell University. License: CC-BY.

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