

Q&A for callers to helpline with specific health concerns/long-term conditions (external use)

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Is there any guidance when on the phone to someone who has Alzheimer’s Disease / Dementia?

Alzheimer’s/Dementia (Alzheimer Society of Ireland)

- Use short simple sentences when explaining COVID 19, or anything else you may talk about
- Answer their questions using their words.
- Do not try to finish their sentences – please be patient.
- Speak in a calm clear voice.

Support available:

- Alzheimer Society has a free call-back service offering one-to-one sessions with a Dementia Nurse or Dementia Advisor. Call 1800 341 341, more info [here](#).

Is there any information or services out there for people with Asthma / COPD?

Asthma /COPD (Asthma Society)

The symptom which differentiates COPD from COVID-19 is:

A “New” fever. Fever is the symptom that has been most common of any symptom in confirmed cases of COVID-19. The HSE are particularly focusing on any patient who is experiencing a “new”

fever or a “new” cough. If you are feeling hot and cold, shivering, and achy bones, you should phone your local GP.

Support available:

- Send message to Asthma Society’s new **Beating Breathless WhatsApp** messaging service (086 0590132) one of the Asthma Society’s respiratory specialist nurses will respond as soon as possible.
- Call the **COPD Adviceline** to speak with a respiratory nurse specialist. Advice line Freephone 1800 83 21 46
- [Staying well at home with COPD](#) leaflet by COPD.ie and Asthma.ie

A lot of people are calling because they are noticing that they are drinking more than usual. What can I suggest?

Alcohol (Drinkaware.ie & HSE)

Dealing with restrictions around Coronavirus and being at home all the time means many older people are drinking more than usual. People are drinking alcohol as a way to cope with stress, anxiety or to cheer themselves up.

If you feel an older person requires further support as they cannot stop drinking, please refer them HSE Drugs and Alcohol Helpline 1800 459 459 or local service. On the call you can still advise an older person and give information on how to reduce their alcohol intake.

Below are a couple of reasons why they should consider reducing their alcohol intake:

1. Alcohol has a negative impact on mental health and can make stressful times feel even worse.
2. Alcohol negatively affects the quality of our sleep, making it even harder to cope in stressful times. (Alcohol is a sedative but once the effects wear off in the second part of the night as the body reacts to the effects of alcohol, sleep quality is reduced.)
3. Alcohol can make our immune system less effective, impacting its ability to fight off viruses.
4. Taking a break or cutting down on alcohol has many health benefits.

Ask the older person to set themselves a goal of drinking less today. Here some tips to help them get there:

1. Break unhealthy new habits. If their new norm is having a few cans of beer etc to pass the time every night, acknowledge that this is happening and make a conscious decision to do something else.
2. Ask them to take note of how much they are drinking per day so they can manage/record a reduction in alcohol.
3. Don’t stockpile. They’re more likely to reach for a drink more often if it’s available.
4. If possible have plenty of non-alcoholic alternatives in the house
5. Work out ways to relax and treat yourself that don’t involve alcohol like reading, listening to music or exercise.
6. Develop and maintain a familiar routine that involves regular sleep, mealtimes and exercise.

7. Set rules around your drinking that will help such as not drinking before 10pm and not drinking on weekdays.

For some callers, their visit to the pub was their main social outing and now it's gone they are drinking in the home. Is it possible to contact those friends by phone? What other activities can the older person do instead?

If drinking, be mindful:

- Always use a measure for your spirits if possible
- Downsize your drink by using a smaller glass.
- Alternate each drink with a glass of water to reduce the dehydration associated with alcohol. Keep a jug of water handy to make this easier.
- Avoid topping up your glass so you can track how much you're really drinking

Reassure them support is available

- If they cannot stop drinking, contact the HSE Helpline for support on 1800 459 459 from Monday to Friday between 9:30am and 5:30pm or email helpline@hse.ie.
- An extensive list of nationwide support available for those with any alcohol issues is available on the [HSE website](#)
- If violence arises in your home contact Women's Aid 1800 341 900 or Men's Aid Ireland 01-554 3811

Are the risks higher for cancer patients during COVID?

Cancer Patient (Irish Cancer Society)

Cancer patients are considered an at risk group of developing a serious illness if they contract the coronavirus and are advised to take extra care. Everyone's risk is different – If they're worried, the best thing to do is for them to contact their cancer doctor or oncology nurses who will know their medical history.

Advice on cocooning applies to the following groups of patients with specific types of cancers:

- People with cancer who are currently being treated with chemotherapy or medication.
- People who are undergoing radical radiotherapy for lung cancer.
- People with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment.
- People having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer.
- People having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors.
- People who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs

If the older person is unsure if they should be following advice on cocooning they should discuss this with their GP or your medical team.

What should a cancer patient do if they the symptoms of coronavirus?

- If a patient being **actively treated for cancer** develops signs of infection, for example high temperature (fever), coughing or shortness of breath, they should urgently make contact with their oncology unit through the liaison phone number they have been given.
- Patients who have **not recently received treatment for cancer** and show signs of infection should follow the usual advice of contacting their GP

Hospitals continue to function and deliver quality cancer treatment with new measures being implemented such as screenings, changes to treatment plans, moving the treatment clinic within the hospital, virtual clinics and visitor restrictions.

Support available:

- HSE information on COVID-19 coronavirus for cancer patients and their families/carers can be found [here](#)
- The Irish Cancer Society is providing remote counselling sessions for people who are affected by cancer and who cannot access face to face services as result of the coronavirus pandemic. **Freephone Nurseline 1800 200 700** or email cancernurseline@irishcancer.ie

I have a caller who is concerned about their mental health and so am I. What should I do on the phone, and what support can I offer?

Mental Health (HSE and others)

There are many calls from older people who are very distressed, anxious and worried. For older people who have more serious concerns, please follow the *ALONE Managing Calls Protocol*, and also the *Protocol for Referring someone to the Samaritans*.

Do's

- Be empathetic
- Be patient
- Listen to the specific issue(s)
- Remain calm
- Be conscious of breathing
- Be aware of your own state of mind & feelings

Don'ts

- Don't get distracted from the issue raised
- Don't dismiss
- Don't exacerbate fears
- Don't provide incorrect information
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Advice for older people on calls who are feeling anxious/depressed/sad

1. Reassure them "you're not alone in how you feel" , there is a lot of similar people out there who are finding the current situation challenging
2. Remind them this situation and the current restrictions are temporary.

3. Ask how often caller feels this way (daily, specific times of the day)
 - Identify times of day where anxiety is higher and if there are any obvious factors why (directly after watching the news?/ once they have finished a call to family member?)
 - Discuss Telephone Support and the benefits it can have to have that frequent chat and check-in at a time that suits them
4. Ask about a routine (a person's routine can be good and not so good)
 - Suggest them organising their day and write down daily "to-do" lists and activities.
 - Develop a regular structure to each day. Routines can reassure you –make sure to schedule in some physical activity, social activity, some timed breaks and think about addressing the times where their mood is low with an activity /exercise etc.
5. Advise them to stay active in and around their home or find new ways to exercise in small ways that are comfortable to them. Enjoy them to get fresh air.
6. Emphasise the importance of eating well, exercise, relaxation
 - Eat and drink healthily -lots of fruit, vegetables and water - to help boost your immune system and energy levels.
7. Ask about sleeping pattern. Keeping a good sleep routine each night will help them feel better the following day.
8. Can they contact any groups that you are involved with and see what new ways they are organising things? If the pub was their main social activity, ask them if they can contact their friends by phone?
9. Ask about interests and hobbies. Creative activities or reading are particularly beneficial. There are many events available live online, including concerts and religious services. They is also support available to access these online.
10. Ensure they have the contacts available they need - friends, family and services.
 - Establish/confirm their system of support and refer to practical work stream if required.
 - Suggest them leaving a set of keys with a neighbour they trust
11. Advise them to spend less time watching the news
12. Encourage caller to take 10 deep breaths and say "In... and Out..."
13. Signposting- what other services or resources can you refer them to?

Supports available:

- Samaritans 116 123
- Pieta House; Talk to a Therapist on 1800 247 247 or text HELP to 51444
- Aware Freephone support line 1800 80 48 48 10am to 10pm every day
- Mental Health Ireland Information line 01 284 1166 from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday
- Suicide or Survive have [online webinars](#) for minding your mental health
- Emergency Services 112 where the person is at immediate risk of self-harm

How do I support an older person with their mental health I know who is cocooning?

- Offer practical help with day-to-day tasks - shopping, picking up prescriptions or medicines.

- Help them plan ahead - discuss the next few days and listen out for concerns they have, or things they may need help with.
- Make contact daily by phone - have a chat and listen to what they say
- Share facts and give clear information that is easy to understand.
- Look out for changes in mood or behaviour - this might mean they are struggling and need extra support.
- Be aware of any cognitive difficulties - they could become more anxious, angry, stressed, agitated or withdrawn.

Provide emotional support through any other informal networks and health professionals

Are there any resources I can offer to those cocooning to keep them active, connected and creative?

Resources:

- Encourage people to stay as active as possible. ALONE has been a contributor to an exercise booklet that has a number of simple exercises for all to follow. Please open the booklet and talk through some of the exercises to people on the phone.
- **'Fitness 15'** is on Monday to Friday at 2.20 PM on RTE1 with Ray Lally, the Today Show fitness expert, and Dáithí Ó Sé. The show will be focused on 15 minute of daily activity and fitness and will help viewers who are at home /cocooning and will offer tips, especially to older viewers, on how to keep healthy and happy.
- **'Siel Bleu Ireland'** are running live daily exercise classes on their Facebook Page at 11 am every day. The older person needs to have a smart phone or tablet and an internet connection.
- **COVID19 Tech** (01 9633288) supports older people to get online and use apps such as Zoom etc.
- **Age Action** have launched a 'Keep In Touch' programme to assist older people with technology during COVID. <https://www.ageaction.ie/how-we-can-help/getting-started-kit> The Age Action Getting Started KIT materials are available by calling 01 8730372, and leaving your name and address, and Age Action will post the How to Guides within 10 days.
- **Living Well Programme** free group programme which supports you to develop the skills to live as well as possible with your long-term health condition (COPD, Asthma, Chronic pain etc). If there is a programme available you may be offered a place straight away. If not, your details will be put on a register. Please see resources for more info.

Please see the full list of Resources for more ideas.