

Hello, I am Dr. Wong, a psychiatrist at Kaiser Permanente. Feelings of isolation brought on by shelter in place orders and social distancing can make all of us feel lonely and maybe even depressed.

Older adults with health conditions who are not leaving their homes at all right now may feel lonely, especially if their daily routine included regular interactions with family, friends or care providers. They may be missing those interactions and concerned about getting the help they need.

If you have a loved one, neighbor or acquaintance who is unable to leave their home, you can help them a great deal just by staying in contact with them and reassuring them. I'd like to share some simple ways you can help ease their concerns and raise their spirits during this time.

Check in with them frequently by phone or even better, by video. Seeing your smile and face is calming and creates connection. Ask how they are doing and make sure they have what they need. If they need you to get groceries or other essentials, take the opportunity when you drop them off for an in-person chat, but at a safe distance of at least six feet.

Encourage your loved one to stick to their routine as much as possible, especially their sleep schedule, eating, medication and appointments. This might require some flexibility such as speaking with medical providers via phone or video, something we at Kaiser Permanente are happy to do.

Support them in staying in touch with their friends and family and do what they can to help one another. Suggest some creative ways to stay connected such as video lunch dates, book clubs, online bridge or exercise sessions. This might even be a good time to explore a new hobby.

Encourage them to limit their exposure to news. In these times media reports can be alarming so checking the news at a specific limited time each day helps to stay informed without becoming overwhelmed. And don't forget to take care of yourself. When you are getting enough sleep, eating right and getting some exercise, you are best able to help others.