

Dr. George Rapiere is the founder, chairman and CEO of WellMed Medical Management, Inc.



Fellow Americans,

This time has been challenging for all of us. From trying to find essentials such as toilet paper, to finding a protective mask, to the challenges of spending a lot more time with people in limited living quarters, it is more than understandable that we're yearning to release some of this stress, breathe some fresh air, and give a big hug to our loved ones.

One thing that I would like to continue to discuss with you is the importance of prevention and staying safe while social restrictions are being relaxed. With recent and upcoming relaxation of stay-at-home and social distancing requirements, it's important to be aware that the risks of contracting COVID-19 have not changed.

Older adults and those with chronic or underlying medical conditions are at risk for severe illness or death as a result of COVID-19. This includes those with diabetes, heart disease, chronic emphysema, asthma or other respiratory illnesses, and adults age 60 or older.

Even if you do not have these risk factors, you should continue to practice the precautions recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), your local health department, and your doctor until there is a vaccine or this crisis is over.

These precautions include only taking necessary trips outside of your home, social distancing, wearing a mask in public, and practicing good hygiene, such as washing your hands for 20 seconds and wiping down heavily touched surfaces.

While some hospitals and clinics are now offering elective surgeries, the CDC recommends waiting until after the pandemic for elective surgeries, and with good reason. The potential for infection, particularly in higher-risk patients, is too high. If you are unsure of your risk, talk to your primary care provider (PCP).

While you should postpone elective surgeries, it is important that you do not miss appointments to manage your health if you have chronic conditions. Make sure that you contact your doctor about options to continue managing your health while limiting your exposure. Many health care providers are now offering online appointments that allow you to meet with your doctor through your smartphone, tablet or computer in the comfort of your own home.

This crisis has created stress in multiple ways for people, including a sense of uncertainty about what's to come. Stress can cause great trouble mentally and physically. In fact, it can make any chronic condition that you have worse and lower immunity. That's why it's so important to practice mindfulness to help manage stress and help ground your mind and your inner peace.

Mindfulness exercises and structured breathing techniques are among the proven techniques that can have enormous benefits in reducing stress. Noted psychotherapist Dr. Sharon Theroux provides some free mindful meditations on www.mindfulsouthflorida.com.

Dr. Andrew Weil¹, a renowned integrative medicine specialist, also has a proven breathing technique that is quick and easy to do anywhere, called 4-7-8 breathing. To see an example visit www.wellmedhealthcare.com/breathe. Give it a try. I think you will find that it really does work if you practice it regularly.

Finally, I hope you join us for a little fun on May 6 at 2 p.m. CT/ 3 p.m. ET for our online concert series WellMed Wednesdays LIVE! Our featured artist is Thomas McClary, founder of The Commodores. Visit www.facebook.com/wellmed/live.

¹www.drweil.com/videos-features/videos/breathing-exercises-4-7-8-breath/

