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Wellness Through Answers News

May/June 2020

*Linking Connecticut Patients, Families, and Residents to
Reliable Health Information*

Have a Personal Health Question?

Wellness Through Answers staff can help you find answers. Our medical librarians research personal health questions for Connecticut residents. Our service is free and confidential. Call or email us with your question: (860) 679-4055 / hnet@uchc.edu

Safe Ways to Save on Pet Medications

We love our pets and want to keep them healthy. Sometimes that means making sure they get their medications. Just like human medications, pet medications can be pricey. Unfortunately, there is no website that owners can use to comparison

shop for the lowest prices for their pet's over-the-counter, or prescription medications.

There are **safe ways to save** on your pet's medications. Manufacturers of some popular pet medications offer discount coupons, and the website PharmacyChecker.com offers a discount card that can be used for both human and pet medications. Buying pet medications in bulk can also save money. PharmacyChecker compares online pharmacy prices with prices charged by Chewy, a pet supply company that sells medications in bulk. Pet insurance can also save owners money on medications.

Scientific Results Released Quickly Should be Questioned

Research for COVID-19 treatments and vaccines is occurring at breakneck speed. There is so much to learn about this virus and quickly translate to patient care. Consumers are bombarded by new research findings on television, newspapers, email, and social media sites. What should you believe and how does the research affect you?

The following are **red flags for questionable research**:

- the study was published on a blog or social media site as a preprint, a format that is not **peer-reviewed**
- the study has only one author
- the subject is outside the researcher's area of expertise
- the analysis was done quickly
- the study was small
- there was no control or placebo group
- the study reported an association or correlation, not a cause and effect

The Debate Over Preprints

Traditionally, scientists share their work by publishing their papers in peer-reviewed journals. Peer review is a rigorous critical appraisal of a paper by experts in that field. The peer-review process **has been criticized** for being slow and uneven, and is no longer considered a guarantee of quality research.

Preprints are seen as a faster way to share research results with the scientific community and the public. Preprints are shared before they are peer-reviewed or

may skip the peer review process altogether. Preprints are collected in searchable repositories like [medRxiv](#) and [bioRxiv](#).

Although preprints make research available faster, their conclusions may be false. Their study design may be faulty, or the results not reproducible. Yet reporters and news anchors may see preprints as peer-reviewed research and treat their findings as legitimate. Treating preprints as published research studies **can be dangerous** and mislead or confuse the general public.

COVID-19 Misinformation Abounds on YouTube

A new study found **25%** of the most popular COVID-19 videos on YouTube contained false or misleading information. These inaccurate videos were seen by millions of people, and far outnumbered factual videos produced by government agencies and respected non-profits. Although this was a small study, its findings suggest a public health opportunity. Government agencies could counter misinformation if they produced more content for YouTube.

Lighten Your Load with Stress-Reducing Activities

In the age of COVID-19, **anxiety** and **depression** seem to affect everyone. The consumer health site, [Healthline](#), describes many **activities to reduce your stress** level and shore up your mental state. Suggestions include animal cams, e-books, self-massage, and do nothing for two minutes. The article links to many apps that may help you decompress or re-set your mood.

When self-care measures don't work, it may be time to see a behavioral health therapist. **Finding the right therapist** can be a challenge. There are many **different types of therapies and therapists** to consider. If cost is a concern, there are organizations like senior centers, family service agencies, and mental health clinics that offer psychotherapy at discounted rates. The National Alliance on Mental Illness's "**COVID-19 Resource and Information Guide**" has links to affordable care and many more services needed by anyone navigating this pandemic.

Discover the Joy of Cooking

The COVID-19 crisis has introduced or re-introduced many people to cooking. Some of us have embraced cooking as a new hobby, while others have viewed it as a stressful chore. **Reorganizing your kitchen** can be the key to making home cooking fun. *Healthline* shares the advice of a **certified professional organizer** on how to prep ingredients, reorganize your kitchen cabinets and pantry, plan menus, and more. Follow these tips, and you might actually like spending more time with your family in the kitchen.

Loneliness and COVID-19 Restrictions

Social isolation and loneliness have been **linked to many physical and mental health problems** including heart disease, diabetes, anxiety, and depression. COVID-19 restrictions on family gatherings, socializing, and visits to nursing homes have intensified older adults' experience of loneliness. Recognizing the important health value of social connections, many countries have introduced **programs to combat loneliness**. Loneliness prevention strategies include:

- weekly phone calls to older adults and chat hotlines
- one-touch computers for messaging, videos, and photo sharing,
- health care providers who can remotely order social support services for lonely older patients

Connecting Seniors to the Internet

Isolated in nursing homes, retirement facilities, or just home-bound, older adults need new ways to stay connected to their families and communities.

The **National Council on Aging** (NCOA) suggests downloading the "**Easy Tablet Help for Seniors**" app before handing a tablet to an older adult unfamiliar with this technology. The app uses large type and simple language to teach adults how to communicate using video chat programs like Skype and Zoom, photos, text, and email. The app is available for both Apple and Android devices.

Other recommended sites for learning about tablet computers:

- **Senior Planet**
- NCOA instructions for **participating in Zoom** events
- AARP's **Personal Technology** column
- Next Avenue's article -**Video chat** services - how to get started

The US Lags Behind Other Countries in Mental Health Services

Compared to other industrialized countries, the US has an enormous need for mental health services. **One in four Americans** has a mental health diagnosis. The US has the **highest number of deaths** due to substance abuse, and the second-highest **rate of suicide**. Americans are also more likely to seek out mental health services than people living in other countries.

Compared to other industrialized countries, however, the US does not have a healthcare system that supports the mental health needs of its population. A **new study** by the health policy think tank, The **Commonwealth Fund**, offers gloomy statistics, but points to other countries whose mental health models the US might emulate or borrow from.

Take a Walk on the Mindful Side

In these times of high anxiety, people are discovering the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness is a form of meditation that involves focusing on what is happening at the moment - thoughts, feelings, sensations, and surroundings, without judgment. Mindful walking or meditative walking is part of mindfulness practice. You may walk slowly in a circle, back and forth in a straight line, or in a labyrinth. Mindful walking techniques may incorporate breathing and mantras.

The **health benefits** of mindful walking include improved circulation, digestion, blood sugar levels, and mental health. Those interested in starting mindful walking can find step-by-step instructions on the **Greater Good Science Center** website.

Safety in Numbers - Herd Immunity

Sweden's controversial soft lockdown allowed parks, restaurants, and schools to remain open. The Swedish government hoped enough people would be infected by the COVID-19 virus to create herd immunity.

When a disease-causing microorganism like a virus invades our body, we develop antibodies that may make us immune to the virus and prevent us from becoming sick again. As more people develop antibodies, the likelihood of someone being exposed to the disease decreases. We develop antibodies to a virus through exposure or vaccination. Herd immunity requires a certain percentage of a population have antibodies to the disease. Highly infectious diseases like measles require a high percentage (**95%**) of the population have antibodies. The

COVID-19 virus is less infectious than measles and might require only **70%** of the population have antibodies for herd immunity. Vaccines are the safest way to confer immunity to a large number of people quickly.

Learn more about herd immunity by watching the Harvard School of Public Health's **video**.

More News You Can Use

Updated guidelines for prostate cancer treatment

Everything you need to know about face masks- **article** and **video**

Your **stimulus check** questions answered

Recommended **books** for reducing caregiver stress

Free **financial counseling** services for people who have lost income due to COVID-19

COVID-19 resources for the **visually impaired**

Google debuts **braille keyboard**

Coronavirus **scam alert**

Dogs trained to **sniff out** the COVID-19 virus

Stress really does cause **gray hair**

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