

AIMS

The goal of the Global Council on Brain Health (GCBH) is to translate scientific research into actionable recommendations for the public to help drive behavior change in individuals across communities and cultures.

The GCBH aims to provide the scientific foundation for policy recommendations aimed at improving public health.

Providing updated recommendations relevant to patient and caregiver advice to reflect the current challenges of living in a pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

- Older adults and members of underserved communities have been disproportionately harmed.
- While we still don't know the full extent of damage the pandemic will cause, scientific evidence has emerged, that, in addition to severe illness and deaths, the virus is also causing damage to people's brain health.
- This presentation explores both the direct and indirect ways the virus may undermine brain health.
- We offer 10 recommendations based upon the current state of the science on how to try to avoid the harms the pandemic poses

METHODS

The GCBH has updated recommendations relevant to patient and caregiver advice to reflect the current challenges of living in a pandemic

This presentation offers recommendations based upon the current state of the science on how to try to avoid the harms the pandemic poses.

The GCBH considered which of their previous brain health recommendations they could make to foster brain health resiliency during the pandemic.

RESULTS: RECOMMENDATIONS

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Brain Health

➤ Infection — direct threats

- Neurologic symptoms are likely to occur during the course of the disease. A loss of taste and smell are among the most common initial neurological symptoms. Other neurological symptoms include headaches, extreme fatigue, and trouble thinking or concentrating, sometimes referred to as "brain fog."
- The medium- to longer-term impact of COVID-19 on the brain and whether this will result in later-life cognitive decline, Alzheimer's disease, or other dementias is another area that calls out for investigation. Although very rare, troubling cases of severe psychotic symptoms like paranoia and hallucinations have been reported in people several weeks to months after they had experienced relatively mild COVID-19 infection even though they had no prior history of mental illness.

➤ Mental well-being — indirect threats

- Heightened health risks, uncertainty, reduced social engagement, new routines, and economic hardship all loom large during this pandemic and can trigger or amplify feelings of stress.
- Cumulative and prolonged stresses may undermine overall brain function, including the ability to think and reason, as well as attention and mood.

➤ COVID-19 and dementia — both direct and indirect threats

- COVID-19 has had an undeniably huge and negative impact on people living with dementia.
- People with a genetic risk for Alzheimer's disease and those living with cognitive decline or dementia appear to be at increased risk for COVID-19 severity.

➤ Dementia caregivers

- COVID-19 has brought added stress to caregivers who are trying to protect themselves while also helping others with cognitive issues who are less able to defend themselves.
- The GCBH encourages caregivers to seek guidance and support, such as those from the IDEAL Programme in the United Kingdom which provides information about how people with dementia can stay well during the pandemic with specific tips to caregivers.

GCBH Top Ten Recommendations to Protect Your Brain Health During COVID-19

For Individuals

1. Consider getting the vaccine as soon as you are able. (See [AARP's guide](#) to the vaccine)
2. Stay physically active. (See the [GCBH's Brain-Body Connection report](#))
3. Maintain a balanced diet. (See the [GCBH's Brain Food report](#))
4. Stay socially connected. (See the [GCBH Report on Social Engagement](#))
5. Maintain a regular sleep schedule. (See [The Brain-Sleep Connection: GCBH Recommendations on Sleep and Brain Health](#))
6. Stimulate your brain. (See the [GCBH's Music report](#))
7. Don't put off necessary medical appointments.
8. Take care of your mental health. (For further discussion, see the [GCBH report on Brain Health and Mental Well-Being](#))
9. Pay attention to signs of sudden confusion. (See the [GCBH Recommendations to Prevent and Treat Delirium](#))
10. Monitor changes in brain health.

CONCLUSION

- It will take an all-society approach to truly protect the health of everyone. In line with the Council's global reach, we are mindful that the spread of COVID-19 has disproportionately harmed more vulnerable populations the world over.
- It is well-established that along with increasing age, being part of racial and ethnic minorities or living in low- to middle-income countries puts individuals at greater risk for getting sick, facing more severe illness, and dying.
- The pandemic has highlighted health disparities and long-standing inequalities that can impact brain health and mental well-being.
- Given this is an evolving area of research, knowledge gaps exist. More research is needed to understand the medium to longer-term impact of COVID-19 on the brain and whether this will result in later-term cognitive decline or other dementias.

REFERENCES

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The GCBH reports with recommendations, practical tips, infographics, and survey results can be viewed on our website at:
www.GlobalCouncilOnBrainHealth.org

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