



BACKGROUND NOTE

COVID-19 and Physical Health

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COVID-19 AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

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Living under coronavirus disease (COVID-19) restrictions underscores the importance of being physically fit and healthy, which helps prevent infection. In addition, physical fitness mitigates mental health issues because of uncertainty and stress. Therefore, in addition to preventive measures, such as frequent hand washing, social distancing, and self-isolation, individuals need to safeguard their overall physical health through physical wellness activities.

The evidence to date show that people with underlying medical conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer, face a higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (WHO 2020, Huang et al. 2020, Wang et al. 2020, Yang et al. 2020, and Liang et al. 2020). Obesity has also been identified as another major risk factor (CDC 2020). These medical conditions have been identified as lifestyle diseases, which can be prevented by lifestyle changes that include proper diet and regular physical activity.

The community lockdowns and quarantines being implemented to contain the spread of COVID-19 are encouraging physical inactivity and greater reliance on processed and canned food, which may increase the risk of metabolic diseases in the population (Jiménez-Pavón, Carbonell-Baeza, and Lavie 2020; and Narici et al. 2020). For example, a study of children and adolescents (6–17 years) in five schools in the People's Republic of China revealed a substantial decrease in physical activity and increase in internet screen time during the COVID-19 pandemic (Xiang, Zhang, and Kuwahara 2020). Studies have shown that reduced physical activity and prolonged sedentary behavior are linked to poor physical and mental health outcomes (Korczak, Madigan, and Colasanto 2017; Haapala, Vaisto, and Lintu 2017; and WHO 2010). Conversely, the beneficial effects of regular physical activity on many health outcomes are well established (Pedersen and Saltin 2015 and Powell et al. 2011).

Wellness activities, including good nutrition, adequate sleep, meditation, and regular exercise, play an important role in preventing COVID-19 infection as well as in recovering from COVID-19. The long-lasting and lingering effects of the disease strengthen the case for wellness practices during the recovery process (Mintz 2020, Parshley 2020, and Wu et al. 2020). COVID-19 survivors need healthy nutrition, good care, and engagement in wellness activities to fully recover and get their lives back on track.

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