

Senior Living



Travel During the Pandemic

When many people retire, the dream is to hit the road and travel.

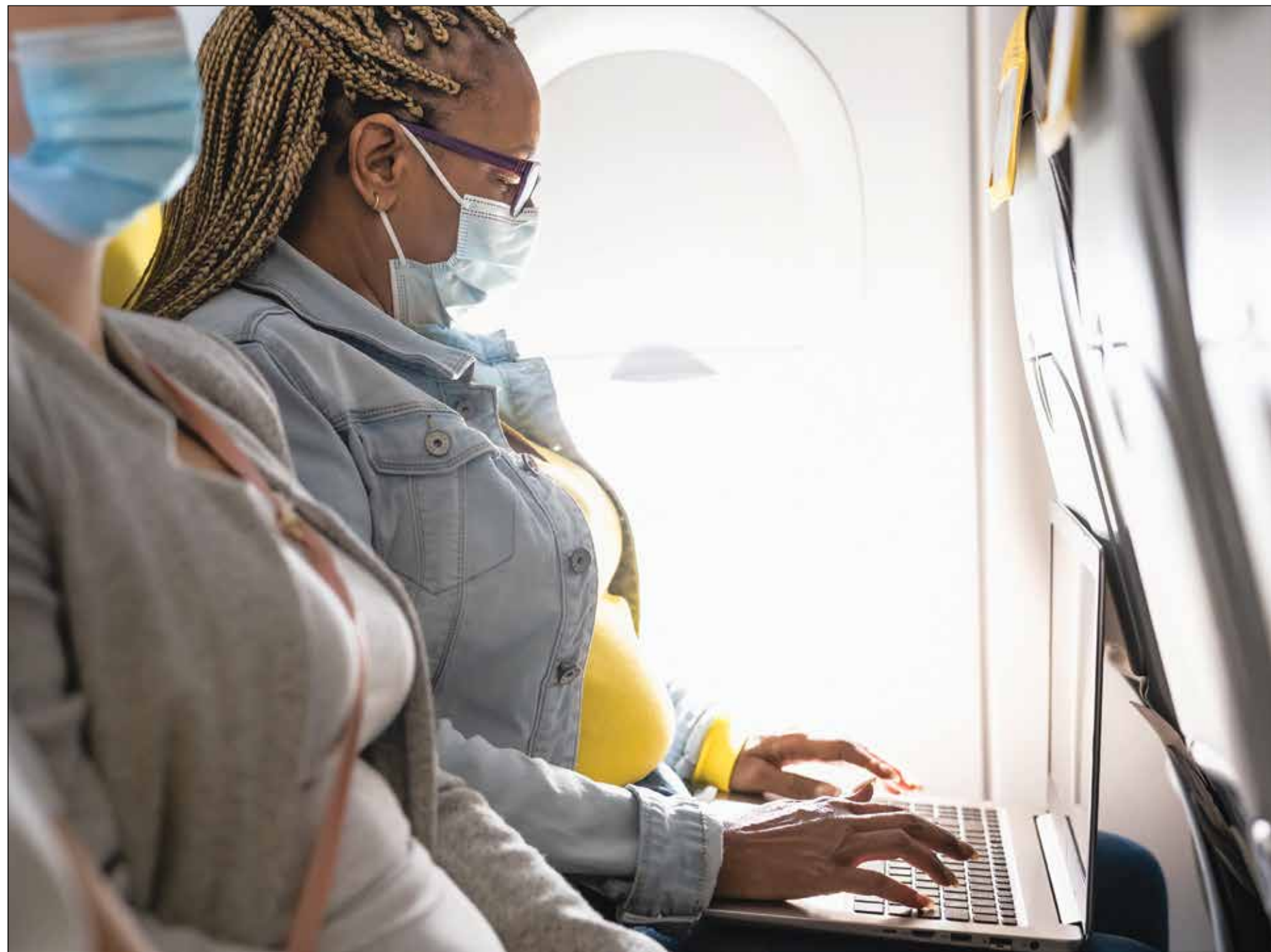
Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic put the brakes on many people's dreams for more than two years now. And, as more places open back up for travel, the routines and procedures are different than they were before the coronavirus, even for those people who are vaccinated. Here's what you need to know about traveling during COVID-19.

GET YOUR SHOTS

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control recommends getting vaccinated before you travel, which may include additional doses for those that are immunocompromised or booster doses as they become available. And that's for more than just COVID-19. Some other vaccines you may need, depending on your destination, include cholera, hepatitis A and B, Japanese encephalitis, malaria, meningitis, rabies, tickborne encephalitis, typhoid fever, yellow fever and more. Also make sure you are up-to-date on your vaccines domestically, too, including flu, tetanus and chickenpox.

CHECK IN

Before booking travel, check in with the CDC to determine the amount of concern about diseases in your destination state or county.



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Look for community spread of COVID-19 and be sure to talk to your doctor before you leave. Tell them about any chronic medical conditions you have, the destinations you will be visiting, the activities you have planned, the types of accommodations you will be staying in, the timing and length of your trip, and any

medications you are taking.

CRUISING

Cruises are popular vacations for older adults, but the onboard environment is favorable for more than just ocean fun. It's an ideal situation for diseases to spread, including norovirus and respiratory illnesses. To keep from getting

sick, the CDC advises to wash your hands often onboard, especially before eating and after using the bathroom or before touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

PLAN FOR THE WORST

Get travel insurance to cover you, especially if you're traveling abroad. Look for pol-

icies that cover travel cancellation, health care, emergency evaluation and emergency evacuation. The CDC also suggests enrolling with the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program to ensure that the U.S. knows where you are if you have medical difficulties while traveling internationally.

Tech for Seniors

Nowadays, even the refrigerators and toasters are going high-tech, with options that are controllable with your phone.

The active aging industry in the U.S., which includes smart living tech, is expected to swell to a \$30 billion behemoth, the Consumer Technology Association says, with tech for seniors representing at least \$900 million. Here are a few of the gadgets and gizmos that might help make your life easier.

EMBODIED LABS

This company offers an immersive program using virtual reality headsets that offer simulations in which caregivers take on the persona of an aging person facing a variety of illnesses, including Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. This will help caregivers develop empathy for their patients and improve the way they deliver care, the company's founder, Carrier Shaw, told CNBC.

INTUITION ROBOTICS

This 2016 startup helps older people avoid loneliness and social isolation, two problems that can contribute to poor health. The ElliQ robot initiates conversation to help people stay in touch with family and friends and engage in healthy behaviors, including



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reminders to take medications. It can also check the weather, suggest activities and show photos sent by loved ones. Intuition partnered with Comfort Keepers, the largest home care provider in the U.S., for distribution.

NEURO REHAB VR

Another company using virtual reality in health care is Neuro Rehab VR. It uses virtu-

al reality to tailor exercises for older patients undergoing physical therapy.

It records physiological and kinematic responses and makes the experience more like a game.

VITALTECH

This cloud-based, connected care platform launched in 2018. It's an emergency and fall-detection watch that can

also track vital signs such as heart rate, respiratory rate and oxygen saturation, as well as physical activity and sleep quality. The water-resistant, sweat-proof watch can also remind people to take medication and charges while someone's wearing it. An app lets others monitor vital signs, historical readings, manage fall alerts and view nutritional information.

AGELESS INNOVATION

Hasbro alum Ted Fischer developed a series of robotic pets under the name. These fluffy companions interact with people the same way a living pet would, offering companionship and promoting happiness. The company says the pets have been shown to be an effective intervention in addressing loneliness in older people.

Navigating Downsizing

A 2017 survey found that more than 10% of home buyers between the ages of 45 and 64 were downsizing, the National Association of Realtors said.

With rooms, wings or entire floors that older people no longer use, dumping the big family home for something smaller and easier to care for is a popular choice. Here are some tips for how to downsize without maximizing your stress.

MAKE A PLAN

You'll need to start thinking about downsizing well before you start planning your actual move. Downsizing and decluttering may even help you sell your current home more quickly and for more money by showing off its spaciousness.

Start off by deciding where you'll move. Closer to family? To a treasured vacation spot? Then pick what kind of space you want. Detached homes offer more privacy, but townhomes and apartments come with less responsibility.

Evaluate your lifestyle — don't be afraid to ask friends and family for help — and decide what options are best for you.

Finally, make a timeline with achievable, reasonable goals. Pick a moving date, then work backwards, setting goals for booking a moving company



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(rule of thumb: the farther you're going, the more notice they'll need), finding a new place, selling your current home, and more.

START SMALL

Decluttering and getting rid of decades of memories is

going to be tough. Start with small steps, like gifting cherished items to friends and family. Go room by room through your home, matching up your things to your new space. Tackle practical things, first, like kitchen and bath supplies, beds and other items that you

have to have. Save emotional items for last; it may be easier to let things go if you've gotten into a decluttering rhythm.

Sort things into piles: keep, toss and give away. Don't, whatever you do, fall into the trap of the maybe pile. Make a decision and stick to it to avoid

hours of agonizing. Let go of multiple items (How many cookie sheets do you really need?) and take the time to thoughtfully process each item, especially the ones you're letting go. Keep an eye on what you're gaining in this move, not what you're losing.

Dealing with Grief

As we age, one thing we have to deal with is losing the people around us.

Friends and family tend to die more frequently, leading to feelings of grief and loneliness that can, at times, be overwhelming even for the strongest among us. Seniors may also be mourning other things, like the loss of mobility, of health or of a beloved family home.

Research shows that grief and the ensuing loneliness impact elderly people differently, Psychology Today says. Stress in older people can decrease the functioning of the immune system. Grief and loneliness are also connected to heart disease, stroke, depression, anxiety, fearfulness and a higher chance of developing Alzheimer's disease, the magazine reports.

Furthermore, loss after loss, as frequently happens in older people's lives, can lead to bereavement overload, Dr. Patrick Arbore said at a conference sponsored by the American Society on Aging. He said that it's critical that seniors move forward with their grief, rather than getting stuck in it and become depressed.

"Grief is an emotional pain that needs to be acknowledged and experienced," Arbore said.

That can come through simply talking about it. Open a conversation with someone who is grieving and listen to



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their memories of friends and family members, or even of places, past. Help acknowledge their loss and let them experience their grief at their own pace.

These conversations may bring up the sadness they feel, but it will also let them

remember and hold onto some of the happiest memories they have. Don't make it about you; instead, remember that you're there as a friend to support them. And remember that just like grief requires good communication, it also, at times, needs space for peo-

ple to process. Try to be on the lookout for when people need time to themselves to work out their feelings.

Here are some things you can do to help people work through their grief:

- Help out with daily stressors, such as cleaning, making

meals or running errands.

- Make a scrapbook of photos of their lost loved ones.

- Check on people enough so that you're sure that they're safe, but don't smother them with additional love and pity. That may make them feel worse.

Seniors and Suicide

Nearly a quarter of people over the age of 55 experience some kind of mental health concern, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says, with the most common conditions being anxiety, severe cognitive impairment and mood disorders.

THE RISK OF SUICIDE

Just like with any age group, mental health issues in seniors can lead to suicide. While older adults make up just 12% of the population, they account for 18% of suicides in the U.S. And they tend to be more successful.

One in four seniors who attempt suicide will succeed, compared to 1 in 200 youths, and, even if they fail, it can be tougher for older people to recover.

WARNING SIGNS

A suicidal person may not just announce their intent to take their own life. But there are red flags that someone is thinking about harming themselves, NCOA says. They include:

- Loss of interest in activities.
- Giving away items or changing their will.



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- Avoiding social activities.
- Neglecting self-care, medical regimens and grooming.
- Exhibiting a preoccupation with death.
- A lack of concern for personal safety.

SUPPORT STEPS

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline says there are five steps you can take to help someone who is thinking about suicide.

1. Ask: Be direct. Ask them if they are thinking about suicide and ask what you can do to help them. Listen carefully to their answers and be sure to acknowledge their pain. Help them stay focused on the reasons why they should want to live.

2. If you're able, be physically present for the person to ease feelings of isolation. You can also use phone or video calls, and work on a way to get

others to visit or call more often. Be sure not to make promises that you're unable to keep.

3. Keep them safe. Find out if they've already made an attempt and find out their plans and timeline. In general, NCOA says, the more detailed the plan is, the higher the suicide risk. Call (800) 273-8255 if someone needs immediate intervention.

4. Establish support systems

that seniors can rely on now and in other times of crisis. Connect them with a mental health counselor (you can use the local Council on Aging or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to find one).

5. Check in often, even after the initial crisis has passed. Even if it's just a text or a card, it shows that you care. And that may mean the difference between life and death.

Seniors and Dating

Dating might seem like a young person's game, but with more seniors living more active lifestyles, it can be an older person's game, too. Here's some advice for getting back out there on the dating scene.

DEALING WITH BAGGAGE

Older people tend to be more experienced, and that's generally a good thing. But sometimes that experience is traumatic, such as in the death of a spouse or a divorce. This Modern Aging says that both experiences can lead to significant self-confidence issues. Before you start looking to find a loving partner again, work on loving yourself, the site says. Give yourself time to heal before casting your nets for another special someone.

BE SELECTIVE

Make sure that when you're looking for someone, you're looking for the right someone. Make a list of the things you want in a partner and don't settle for anything less. Remember, you're not too old to date. And you're worth doing it right. Think of each date as a learning experience and refine your list as you go.

HOW TO MEET PEOPLE

Dating these days is ruled



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by apps, if you believe the TV commercials, and there are plenty of apps out there, including those exclusively for older people. But that's not the only way to meet someone new.

Consider taking a class, volunteer for a cause that you're passionate about, join a church. All of these are great places to meet people with common interests.

Wherever you go, be present in the moment and not glued to your phone. Be ready to engage wherever you are.

STAYING SAFE

Dating is exciting, but it can also be a scary place. Here are some tips for staying safe from RAINN:

- Use different photos for your dating profile than for your social media pages. This

makes it more difficult for someone to find you.

- Avoid connecting with suspicious profiles, such as those that only have one picture or no bio.

- Run your potential date through a search engine or ask a tech-savvy friend to do it for you.

- Beware of anyone who asks for money, even if it's for a sudden personal crisis of

some kind.

- Don't give out your phone number or talk outside the dating app or site.

- Report any offensive behavior to the dating site immediately. This includes requesting financial assistance, requesting photographs, sending harassing or offensive messages, or any attempts to threaten or harm you.

Learning New Skills

Giving up your day job for the life of a retiree doesn't mean you have to give up learning new things.

In fact, it frees up a whole lot of time to do just that. Learning new skills can help improve your physical and mental health and keep you living independently longer. Plus, it can be really fun. Here are some ways to keep sharp, even in your senior years.

LEISURE CLASSES

If you live near a university of college of any kind, including a community college, it may offer leisure classes for adults over a certain age. The University of West Florida in Pensacola, for instance, offers a range of programs for people over 55 for a flat fee of \$40 annually, plus a small fee per class. These classes include playing musical instruments, bonsai classes, cheese tours, touring local landmarks and more.

Other universities will offer lifelong learning institutes funded by the Bernard Osher Foundation. These classes, often called OLLI, offer a stress-free learning environment with no homework and no tests. There are 124 university-affiliated OLLI programs around the country, and each course offered has low fees. Some of the courses offered at one program at Louisiana State University, include basic hatha yoga, line dancing, the six



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queens of Henry VIII, Italian wines, and financial literacy classes.

COUNCILS ON AGING

Your local Council on Aging may also offer classes that would let you learn a new skill or pick up a new hobby. The Pima Council on Aging in Arizona, for example, offers healthy living programs for

improving balance, living with diabetes and fitness courses. The Missoula, Montana, Aging Services is offering virtual classes from the AARP so that seniors can connect from the safety of their own homes and virtual caregiver support groups.

PARKS AND RECREATION

City parks and recreation

departments are another great place to look for senior classes, especially those that get you moving. Many places offer free or low-cost exercise classes and programs just for seniors that work on things like improving balance and relaxing. St. Louis County, Missouri, offers Wii bowling for just \$2 per person, and free walking at local community centers.

SILVERSNEAKERS

SilverSneakers is a fitness and wellness program that's free to seniors over 65 on certain Medicare plans. It's designed to get people fit at more than 15,000 fitness locations and also includes health and wellness discounts. There are also online classes so you can work out in the comfort of your own home.