

Impact of Covid-19 on older people's physical and mental health

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Covid-19 has disproportionately impacted older people

- 1.8 million people over the age of 50 have been advised to shield, while everyone over the age of 70 has been advised to take extra precautions.*
- 28% of people 50-69 and 24% of people say their exercise routine is being affected **
- 26% of people 50-69 and 33% of over 70s say their access to non-Covid related healthcare is being affected
- 42% of adults aged 70+ are reporting high levels of anxiety



*NHS Digital Shielded Patient List Data Accessed on 19/01//2021

** ONS data on the social impacts of the coronavirus on Great Britain

Methodology

Online survey promoted through Age UK networks (August 2020)

- 569 responses (incl. 369 older people & 200 family/ informal carers)
- 78% of respondents aged 65+ and 56% aged over 70
- 70% of family respondents answering on behalf of someone 80+
- 66% reported at least one long term condition
- 22% had been advised to shield

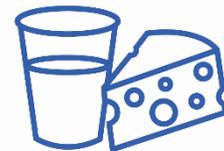
Representative online poll older people (Kantar. Aug – Sept 2020)

- All respondents aged 60+ with nearly half over the age of 70
- 40% reported at least one long term condition
- 14% had been advised by the NHS they were ‘extremely clinically vulnerable’

The themes identified and issues raised closely align to what we heard through our telephone services and in written communication throughout.

Physical health

"I seem to have become less able in many ways. I think the less you use it the more you lose it"



A large number of older people have seen their physical health decline

We asked older people the extent to which they agree with a series of statements about how their health has changed since the start of the pandemic.

- One in three people agree they now have less energy
- One in five feel less steady on their feet
- One in four agree they can't walk as far as before
- One in five are finding it harder to remember things



The pandemic has exacerbated health inequalities

People with pre-existing long term health conditions were more likely to report deteriorating health, and ‘shielders’ most likely of all.

- Half of ‘shielders’ say they can’t walk as far
- Half have less energy
- 1 in 3 feel less steady on their feet
- 1 in 3 say they are less independent

People from more disadvantaged social grades have experienced a greater decline in health

- 39% have less energy compared to 26% of those from the most advantaged
- 22% feel less steady on their feet compared to 14% from the most advantaged
- 31% can’t walk as far compared to 19% of the the most advantaged

Physical deconditioning

- Older people are finding it harder to walk and are more reliant on aids
- They are also finding every day activities around the house harder to complete.
- Reductions in mobility are having a knock-on effect on older people's weight, mood, and energy
- Some older people have told us they are falling more frequently than before

"Much poorer mobility and weight gain has made it even harder to do normal everyday things like accessing the upper floor of my home, hanging out washing doing a bit of gardening" (Female, 60-64)

"Weakness in legs more difficult need to use walking stick or pusher. Also balance poor and no energy." (Female, 85-89)

"Mum used to catch busses to the next town and walk across town and back home on the bus. Now she is struggling to walk down the path."



Long-term impact of reduced healthcare

- Reduced access to appointments and treatment has left older people in pain and unable to do the activities which are important to them.
- In many cases their condition has deteriorated while awaiting treatment.
- Many still don't know when their treatment will be rescheduled which is compounding their anxiety. They fear it will never happen.

'He has an arthritic knee and needs cortisone injection which is not available for another 3 months. He is in crippling pain and less mobile'

'My mum has arthritis. She had a replacement hip in February. She had one check up post op in person and a couple of physio appointments. The rest took place by phone and were pretty useless. Her knee has now deteriorated- she is immobile and housebound'

'Because my cancer and diabetes check-ups have been cancelled, and I have been unable to see a GP in person, I am worried that my conditions have worsened'

Older people who struggled with daily tasks are now finding them harder

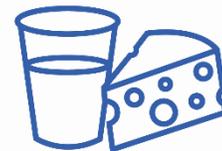
We asked older people with existing health difficulties how their ability to do daily activities had changed

- Two in five people who had difficulties walking short distanced before the pandemic now find this more difficult
- One in three people who find it hard to walk up and down the stairs now find this more difficult
- A third of people who have difficulty getting in and out of bed now find this more difficult
- Two in five people who already found it difficult to shower or wash now find this more difficult



Mental health

"I just feel so scared to go out, my depression has a knock on effect on my pain, not being able to go outside means my mind keeps going round in circles making more depressed, no conversations, no laughter, in debt and overweight from takeaways, I feel unloved unwanted" (Female, 55-59)



Anxiety

- One in three of the people we polled agreed that they have felt more anxious since the start of the pandemic
- People living with long-term health conditions or who had been shielding were more likely to be feeling anxious

"it's no use going anywhere because it's too risky. Last time I went out to the bank a young woman coughed in my face! I worried for 14 days after in case she had the virus and I felt quite ill and panicky." (Female, 75-79)

"Covid has made me into a hermit afraid to go out and when I do I just want to get things done and get back home again to the safety of my home" (Male, 65-69)

"Being scared of contact with people and the isolation at same time" (Female, 70-74)



Low mood and lack of motivation

- Over a third of older people also agreed that they are feeling less motivated to do the things which they used to enjoy
- Older people have lost pleasure in life and don't have the motivation or energy to do the things they used to enjoy
- They are struggling to get out of bed and dressed. They have also stopped taking care of themselves, for example by not washing or eating.

"feelings of "is this life worth living" and no joy in even the simple things in life which previously would make a day worth living"
(Female, 60-64)

"I just sit i know i should get up every now and again due to other health reasons, i go days without showering lost all energy to self-care"
(Female, 65-69)

"Feel really down a lot and can't always be bothered to get dressed and go out." (Female, 70-74)



Loss of confidence

We asked older people how their confidence in doing common activities had changed since the start of lockdown

- One in five feel less confident going for short walks outside
- One in five are less confident leaving the house by themselves
- Nearly half feel less confident going to a hospital appointment
- Two-fifths feel less confident going to a GP surgery

“It’s sad to see how much lockdown has drained her confidence - gone from someone who attended regular groups out daily - to someone who is scared to go over her doorstep. Complete lack of confidence in their ability to cope with day to day tasks and everyday living.”



Local Impact

April – June 2020

- Unable to get an online or telephone delivery slot
- Outpatient care
- Befriending
- GP Appointment
- Divorce, separation and relationship breakdown
- Ambulance / A&E
- Can someone collect my prescription for me/who can support me locally
- Money
- Physical health problems
- Bereavement
- Help with online deliveries
- Accessing and receiving care
- Can someone do my shopping for me/who can support me locally
- I'm feeling lonely/having mental health issues

56% of annual enquiries in first 3 months of COVID



Local Response

- Over 1500 emergency food parcels and shopping
- Over 500 prescriptions delivered
- Emotional Support Service saw a 50% increase in demand from older people suffering from anxiety and issues affecting their mental health
- Over 2000 activity packs distributed
- Exercise DVD/videos/online content
- Over the year – 5000 online attendances for activity groups
- 500 volunteers
- Digital Response – 1000 people supported to get online, 250 tablets distributed, 150 training sessions
- Joint VCS Partnership Response

Next steps