

OLDER AND WISER: It's especially important to keep up with activities this fall

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I do not know about you, but every September I start thinking about a start to a new season of activity.

The fall seems like a time to begin new adventures perhaps taking a class at Elder College, going back to North Vancouver rec centres, starting a new project or finishing one you put aside while enjoying the outdoors and catching up with old friends who have been away on vacation (maybe just enjoying British Columbia)

We have been living by some strict rules at this stage of the COVID-19 pandemic but the summer weather has supported many activities. In the good weather we enjoyed outdoor activities such as backyard visiting, meeting in the park for a physical distanced yak or a game of Scrabble or going to a safe outdoors seniors' event.

But this September as we continue to deal with COVID-19 and the weather changes, there is a lot of uncertainty about continuing these activities and potentially starting new ones. Some seniors may be apprehensive about how this fall will go, with the possibility of a new surge in the virus which could trigger another lock down. Seniors may be worried that the reopening of organizations to accommodate them safely may be put on hold again. The thought that we might be standing in lines outside buildings during cold rainy weather is discouraging,

Hopefully with people continuing to follow the guidelines laid out by Dr. Bonnie Henry and the province we can continue to be on the same playing field as we are now, with a gradual opening of community and recreation centres. Physical distancing, washing our hands, avoiding large gatherings, and staying healthy are great strategies.

If we want to be prepared for the fall and winter activities, we can try some other strategies to be COVID-19 ready. A major strategy is looking after our health – by exercising and staying well. Keeping flu, colds, and pneumonia at bay will assist us in getting through the winter months. Which means making sure to get your flu and pneumonia shots as early as possible.

The problem that occurs with some people who contract the flu is that it can lead to other more serious illnesses, it can be easily spread to other people (those with compromised immune systems, elderly people, pregnant women, and those who don't get vaccinated) and it can put you out of commission for a week or more. Seniors with pneumonia are at increased risk for hospitalization, complications, and death. Pneumonia in elderly adults can often be serious and progress quickly.

Also perhaps talk to your doctor about a shingles shot which is expensive but recommended. I can personally attest to how important the shot is as my shingles experience was very unpleasant.

Another strategy for coping with COVID-19 and the changing weather is to keep up your activities outside the home by finding a program at a seniors or recreation centre. Many of these centres are offering limited programs on site but are also offering many virtual programs. Check out Silver Harbour and West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centres and Parkgate Community Centre. Elder College is offering an array of good programs online as well. If you are still not comfortable on a computer, check out the libraries who are offering support to non-tech savvy seniors.

Getting exercise is a key to staying healthy. Keep Well Society is providing some online exercise programs with also a gradual reopening of on-site programs. The rec centres are starting to reopen as well – check their websites for programs. Try mall walking if you do not want to go to a centre – this is a great way to get your exercise without being outdoors.

Being COVID-19 prepared in the fall might mean making sure your prescriptions are up to date, that you have booked your doctors appointments and have seen the dentist. You could also make sure you have enough canned and paper goods, hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies on hand in case there is a shortage in the late fall.

Isolation is always danger for seniors. Staying in touch with friends and family is especially important to staying healthy and contributes to your ability to withstand the anxiety caused by the pandemic. Try to use email and video calls to friends regularly or just telephone to stay connected.

Get ready to enjoy the best aspects of the fall and winter seasons but stay safe.

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