

**4** Eat to Beat  
Brain Fog

**6** Effectively  
Communicating  
with Older Adults



# *living*

**INDEPENDENT**

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## **Virginia seniors keen to take COVID vaccine to ‘feel safer’ and ‘not be so isolated’**

**H**ealth experts in Central Virginia say the FDA’s approval of Pfizer’s coronavirus vaccine is a turning point in the course of the pandemic.

Governor Ralph Northam says vaccines will roll out as soon as Sunday to two vulnerable groups of people in Virginia – seniors in long-term care facilities and healthcare workers.

Joan Kerby lives in Henrico, Virginia and hopes to get vaccinated soon.

“I will take whatever I can get just to not be so isolated,” Kerby said. “It’ll be a big relief.”

Kerby lives independently and says those in higher levels of care will be first priority, but she hopes to be included in

the initial group to receive the shot.

“I would feel safer if I went into a grocery store, safer buying gas for the car, being out among people,” she said.

### **Initial doses are also on the way to front line workers.**

Internalist and hospitalist at VCU Health, Dr. Alan Dow, said VCU Health will receive nearly 4,000 doses of the vaccine.

“We’ve had a number of healthcare workers across the country that have gotten sick and died from COVID,” said Dr. Dow.

He said bedside workers and those taking care of COVID-19 patients will

get vaccinated first. He expects to receive his shot mid-January.

Dr. Dow also recognizes some healthcare workers are hesitant about receiving the vaccine.

“I think with anything new, particularly something that has happened this quickly, there are going to be people that have doubts,” said Dr. Dow.

“What’s important to know is this has been carefully vetted.”

According to Interim Chief Medical Officer of VCU Medical Center, Dr. David Lanning, a system is in place to track employees’ potential reactions or side effects.

Dr. Lanning says side effects could include fever or fatigue. He’s anticipating that some workers may call out

of work the day after receiving a shot, but mentions only a small fraction will likely experience symptoms.

“I would just encourage those to really look at the data and rely on the experts that it is safe,” said Dr. Lanning.

While Kerby waits for her vaccine, she says she’s just happy to know front line workers will be protected from COVID-19.

“They’ve put their lives on the line for everyone,” she said. “They deserve to be thanked by getting the vaccine.”

To get the virus under control, health officials say at least 70% of the population needs to be vaccinated.

According to Virginia Department of Health, that could happen in the

## What to Expect from a COVID-19 Vaccination

If you’ve gotten a COVID-19 shot, congratulations! You’re on your way towards some very impressive protection from novel coronavirus infections.

Over the next few days, you might notice the arm where your vaccine was injected feels sore, and you might feel some fatigue, headache, or other common vaccine side effects.

This is a good sign that the shot is working as planned, and that your body is building up its defenses against the virus.

But, if you’re thinking that this new jab in the arm also means you can go ahead and throw your face masks in the trash right away – not so fast.

The two coronavirus vaccines authorized for use so far in the US, from Moderna and from Pfizer, are given as two separate shots, administered three to four weeks apart.

The shots are extremely effective, and your body will start to develop some protection from infection, beginning

somewhere around two weeks after the first one is injected, but that coverage isn’t complete until several weeks later,

well after the second dose should be scheduled.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the country’s top infectious disease expert, recently explained to the *Harvard Business Review* that “you will get some degree of protection, literally within 10 to 14 days” after the first dose, as studies have shown.

But, he stressed “it will not be maximum, and we don’t know how durable it would be” without a second shot.

These vaccines protect people very well from serious disease and death, but they may not stop the spread.

These new vaccines protect people very well from developing symptoms of COVID-19, and they’re near-perfect at eliminating death.

“But if you want to get back to normal, just you or a few other people being vaccinated doesn’t change the dynamics of the outbreak,” Fauci said.

It’s possible that vaccinated people could still be asymptomatic virus carriers, unwittingly spreading infections around to others in their population. That could

spring or summer of next year as more vaccines become available.

### COVID-19 Precautions

Most patients with COVID-19 have mild to moderate symptoms. However, in a small proportion of patients, COVID-19 can lead to more severe illness, including death, particularly among those who are older or those who have chronic medical conditions.

COVID-19 spreads primarily through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

Symptoms include fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. Symptoms appear within 14 days of being exposed to an infectious person.

Virginia health officials urged the fol-

lowing precautions:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer only if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when coughing or sneezing.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Avoid contact with sick people.
- Avoid non-essential travel.

By Tyler Layne

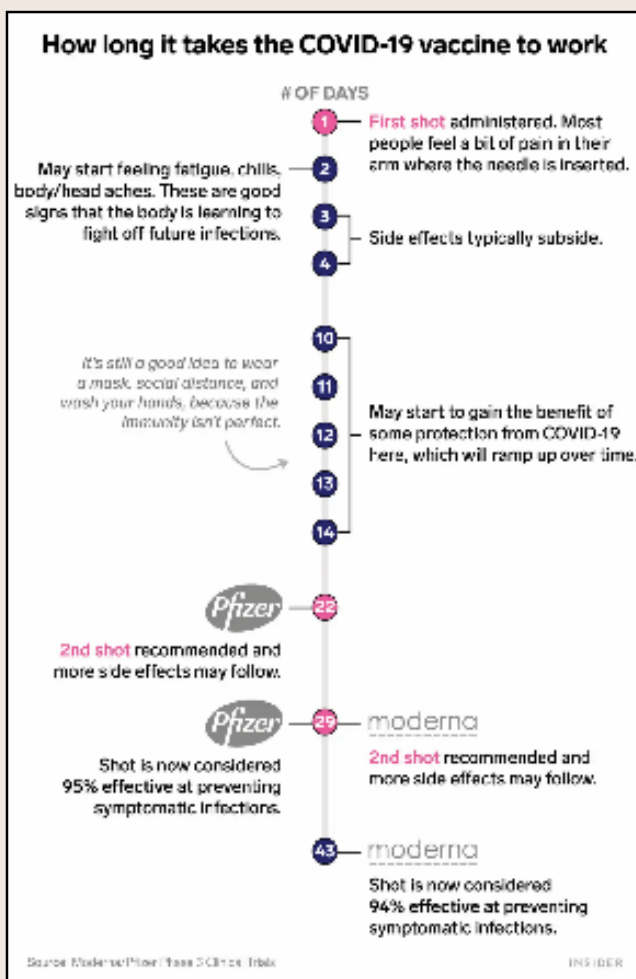
Channel 6 News, Richmond

be a problem, if a majority of people choose not to get vaccinated, because it could mean that the more deadly and debilitating forms of this disease would continue to spread to healthy people who aren't vaccinated.

That's why it'll still be important to social distance and wear a mask for at least several months to come.

The good news is that this country, and the world, have conquered diseases like this before: mass inoculating people against deadly and crippling infections including smallpox, polio, and many other now-defunct diseases, which have been wiped out by vaccinations.

*Hilary Brueck and  
Shyanne Gal  
—Business Insider*





## Eat to Beat Brain Fog

By Jenna Farmer

**W**e've all had those 'where on earth have I put the keys?' moments, but for some of us continually struggling to process information and constant forgetfulness can be signs of brain fog. But can anything be done to help us think clearer in 2021?

There might not be an actual fog around you, but it certainly feels like there is. You might find yourself desperately searching your brain to locate information you're sure you knew yesterday. Or perhaps at work, you find yourself struggling to take in a presentation, or grasp lengthy instructions.

There are many reasons for brain fog (which is a collection of symptoms rather than a medical condition), so it's important to speak to your GP, who may do some tests to see if it could be caused by other issues, such as thyroid problems, anemia, or autoimmune disease.

While brain fog can't be cured just by the foods we eat, nutritional deficiencies can cause similar symptoms, so addressing them can really make a difference.

### The sunshine vitamin

In the winter months, with fewer daylight hours and chances to soak up the sun outside, the NHS recommends that everyone take a vitamin D supplement to compensate for the lack of sunlight.

"The current government advice is to take 400mg vitamin D between October and March to keep bones and muscles

healthy, but some individuals may need higher doses," explains registered nutritional therapist Valentina Cartago. "Low vitamin D levels are common in those who spend a lot of time inside, which could certainly apply to many of us at the moment! A 2019 study from Rutgers University, New Jersey, found that those who supplemented vitamin

D noted an improvement in their memory, so it is well worth considering.

### Tuck into oily fish

Oily fish are packed with omega 3s and fatty acids, yet many of us – an estimated two thirds in fact – fall short of eating the recommended two portions a week. But if you're not tucking in, you're missing out! Studies have shown that the omegas found in oily fish are crucial in helping with things such as mild cognitive impairment and memory loss.

### Could you be B12 deficient?

B vitamins are really important for our nervous system, so low vitamin B12 can leave you struggling with extreme fatigue (which can contribute to symptoms such as poor concentration), along with problems with your memory and understanding. It's relatively rare to be B12 deficient, but it does get more common as you grow older. B12-rich foods include red meat, poultry, and eggs, or nutritional yeast, and fortified cereals for vegans.

### Up your hydration

One of the simplest things you can do for brain fog is to make sure you're well hydrated. When you're dehydrated, it can even impact your attention span and cognitive ability.

"Your brain is around 75% water, and dehydration has been linked to issues such as fatigue and brain fog to name a

few, therefore ensuring that you are keeping hydrated throughout the day is key,” Valentina explains. “As a general rule though, it can be useful to monitor your urine color throughout the day, ensuring that it is pale yellow.”

It might surprise you to know your morning cup of coffee doesn't have to go out the window; some studies have found that caffeine can actually have a positive effect on energy levels, concentration, and cognitive ability – but drinking more than a few cups a day could be detrimental.

Herbal teas can be a great alternative, and they have their benefits, too. A study at Northumbria University found peppermint tea actually enhanced cognition by helping to improve both memory and alertness.

### Try a Mediterranean diet

Most people will have heard that a Mediterranean diet – which includes a lot of fresh fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, and

fish – can be good for your body. But did you know that it can be good for your brain, too?

There's plenty of science behind this, too: sticking firmly to the Mediterranean diet has been associated with a slower cognitive decline, as revealed by a study published in the journal *Current Opinion in Clinical Nutrition & Metabolic Care*.

Whether you opt to cut out the caffeine, stock up on fish, or ditch the sugar, the important thing is to find a solution that works for your body and your mind. Since we're all so different, working with a qualified nutritionist or dietitian can be really helpful to figure out what triggers your brain fog, and hopefully help it become a thing of the past.

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*Jenna Farmer is a freelance health writer and nutritional therapist. She has Crohn's disease and blogs about her journey to improve gut health. [HTTP://ABALANCED-BELLY.CO.UK](http://ABALANCED-BELLY.CO.UK)*

## Alzheimer's Approved: Alzheimer's & Dementia Care Specialist

**Independent You** is happy to announce that we have added additional training for our team members over the past few months.

Our certified nursing assistants are required to complete 12 hours of continuing education every year by the Virginia Department of Health. Recently **Lily Gonzales, Manso Dumbuya, Azeb Getahun** and **Janet Boamah** completed their Alzheimer's & Dementia Care Specialist Class.

The Alzheimer's & Disease Care Specialist class provides 8 hours of training that focuses solely on caring for clients with Alzheimer's and Dementia. Upon completion, our care team will be well-equipped to meet all our clients' Alzheimer's and dementia care needs.

Specialized Learning Paths are pre-built sets of curriculum that focus on common con-

ditions caregivers encounter with their clients. Learners who complete the learning path receive a badge and certificate that designates them as a Specialist in Alzheimer's and Dementia care.

All seven (7) courses in this learning path are recognized by the Alzheimer's Association.

Courses in this learning path include:

- All about Alzheimer's and Dementia
- Activities for Individuals Living with Alzheimer's Disease
- Mealtime with Alzheimer's & Dementia
- Communicating with Individuals Living with Alzheimer's and Dementia
- Safe Environments for People Living with Dementia & Alzheimer's Disease
- Supporting and Guiding Individuals through Dementia-Related Behaviors
- Preventing Elopement



**Lily Gonzales**



**Manso Dumbuya**



**Azeb Getahun**



**Janet Boamah**



## Effectively Communicating with Older Adults

**M**any adult children have experienced this paradox: At the very time they need to communicate with their aging parent about important issues in their life, the older person begins experiencing impediments that make communication difficult. Many times, it's a medical problem—i.e., recovery from a stroke, cognitive impairment, diminished hearing or eyesight. Other times, it can be a psychological or emotion issue—such as depression, anxiety, fear of death—that makes them reluctant to confront important issues head-on.

The types of issues adult children may need to discuss with their older parents include: creating or updating a will or living trust, designating general durable power of attorney and health-care power of attorney, creating a living will or advance directive, preparing HIPAA authorization forms, selling their home, and moving into assisted living.

Many of these issues are complicated and require conferring with legal or medical experts. In some instances, dis-

cussions become fraught with emotion as parents and their adult children grapple with issues that are literally matters of life and death.

### Guidelines for Enhancing Communication

Several national and local agencies offer clear-cut guidelines and suggestions for enhancing communication with older adults when it comes to such issues. The Administration on Aging, for instance, stresses the importance of health literacy, cultural competency, and meeting the needs of persons with limited English proficiency in order to communicate with older adults effectively.

Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs), which provide information and assistance to individuals on the subject of long-term care, likewise stress the importance of health literacy. According to an ADRC report on health literacy, while the average adult in the U.S. reads on an 8th- or 9th-grade level, literacy levels among older adults may be lower. In such cases, the individual might have



trouble comprehending language, processing quantitative information, following directions, and filling out forms.

The report suggests guidelines for ADRC staff to use in oral or verbal communication so that it corresponds to the individual's reading level. One of the tools suggested is the Fry Graph, which calculates the number of sentences and syllables used per hundred words. Adult children can take a cue from the guidelines when speaking with their parents.

If your parent is having difficulty comprehending complex financial or medical issues, try using simpler sentence structure and shorter words. Wait for confirmation that your parent understands what you are saying before continuing,

and when possible use visual aids and written resources to make your point clearer.

However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stresses that reading ability is just one aspect of health literacy. Effective communication on healthcare issues can be thwarted for other reasons as well. In an Expert Panel Report from the CDC on health literacy, the consensus was that much of the difficulty in navigating the healthcare system comes from the complexity of the system itself. Experts quoted in the study pointed out that the typical adult with a high school education may not have the skills necessary to use the system effectively without help and guidance. Legal issues can be similarly complex.

If the issue you are addressing with your parent is so difficult that you yourself don't understand it, be sure to call upon the appropriate experts who have experience in explaining complex matters to their patients or clientele. You don't have to go it alone.

## Communication Strategies

Having more effective communication with older parents on complex or even ordinary everyday issues often comes down to empathy and understanding. Seeing things from the other person's perspective can help you communicate with your parent more effectively. Based on expert recommendations and opinions, we commend the following strategies:

- **Be patient.** According to an article in *Psychology Today*, this is especially important if age is slowing your parent down and cognitive functioning has diminished.
- **Don't talk down to the individual.** Using simpler language and sentence structure (as recommended above) is fine if it makes a difficult issue easier to understand. But don't insult your parent's intelligence by talking in the same manner that you address a child.
- **Provide options.** No matter what their age, adults want to feel in control of their lives, according to the *Psychology Today*. Even if you are trying to act in your parent's best interests, providing options is better than making a unilateral decision. It also helps maintain the older adult's sense of independence.
- **Listen as well as talk.** Communication is a two-way street. Don't forget to take pauses in the conversation so that your parent can interject his or her opinion. Even though a loved one has aged, in many ways, he or she is the same person you knew growing up. Taking time to hear your parent's point of view will help ensure decisions being made, on both matters large and small, are in keeping with the wishes of this very important person in your life—and that should be the ultimate gauge of whether your communication with your parent has been effective.

*Source: ourparents.com*



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