

Keeping a healthy heart during COVID-19

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People who suffer from cardiovascular disease and hypertension are vulnerable during COVID-19 and need to be protected, according to an expert in cardiovascular health from The University of Western Australia.

Professor Livia Hool from UWA's School of Human Sciences said although people with [heart conditions](#) were no more likely to get

COVID-19 than others, if they did contract the virus it could result in more severe symptoms.

"We are dealing with a virus that primarily affects the respiratory system, however this can also affect the heart as the lungs and the heart work together to pump oxygenated blood around the body," Professor Hool said.

"Anything that targets the [respiratory system](#), is undoubtedly going to put more strain on the cardiovascular system.

"In addition, COVID-19 works by attaching itself to a receptor called Angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 which plays a vital role in the cardiovascular and immune systems.

"Children may be less susceptible because the way the protein interacts with their immune system is more efficient at fighting off the virus.

"The good news is most people will experience mild symptoms and make a full recovery, but patients should keep up to date with the Chief Medical Officer's advice, continue to take their medications as prescribed by their doctor, seek medical advice if necessary and get the flu vaccine. "

Professor Hool said although the group was more vulnerable there were measures that could be taken to ensure greater protection.

"Social distancing is most important to beat this virus in conjunction with regularly washing your hands and practicing good hygiene. But there are also other ways to increase heart health, particularly for those with heart conditions or those who want to improve their heart health," she said.

Top tips to keep the heart healthy

- Maintain a good routine. Find ways to keep yourself busy with regular activities, particularly if you are in isolation.
- Eat a healthy diet to boost your immunity. Stick to three main meals a day and don't snack on bars, chocolate, sweets and chips.
- Increase fruit, vegetables, nuts, oats and legumes and eat fresh fish and lean meat as proteins in your diet.
- Exercise regularly.
- Stay connected with family, friends and work colleagues.
- Seek advice if necessary. The Heart Foundation provides a Heart Healthline 13 11 12 that can be used for advice on [cardiovascular disease](#) by telephone.

Professor Hool said Indigenous and remote communities were also at risk from heart complications and COVID-19.

"Indigenous Australians have a higher risk of complications from heart [disease](#) and are two to three times as likely to be hospitalised for ischaemic heart disease and [heart](#) failure. Government restrictions isolating these communities have been incredibly important in protecting them from the disease," she said.

"Remoteness in WA can present challenges for the delivery of healthcare but remoteness is also protecting communities as they are more isolated from COVID-19.

"This pandemic will challenge policy makers and health authorities as they work to protect those most vulnerable."

Provided by University of Western Australia

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