



Ask the Can Do Team Self-Care and the Coronavirus Episode 22

Brian Thompson: Thank you for joining us for our virtual panel session brought to you by Can Do Multiple Sclerosis, as part of our mission that helps families living with MS thrive. We want to bring together this panel of experts to discuss coronavirus. It is everywhere on the news, we all have questions about how best to live with the threat of this disease, quarantining, and how to manage our day to day lives. We are thrilled to have an esteemed panel. I am going to let them introduce themselves starting with Roz Kalb, Clinical Psychologist. Hello, Roz.

Roz Kalb, PhD: Thanks, Brian. Hello to my favorite colleagues. I am Roz Kalb. I am a Clinical Psychologist. I am a consultant for Can Do Multiple Sclerosis and for the National MS Society.

Brian: Great. We also have to join us, Mandy Rohrig. She is a Physical Therapist. Hello, Mandy.

Mandy Rohrig, PT, DPT, MSCS: Hi, everyone. Thank you, Brian. My name is Mandy Rohrig. I am a Physical Therapist and a Can Do MS Programs Consultant. I am all with you today from Omaha, Nebraska.

Brian: Okay. Thank You. We have Mona Bostick, who is a Registered Dietitian. Hi, Mona.

Mona Bostick, RDN, LDN: Hi. I am Mona Bostick. I am a Registered Dietitian. I live in Greensboro, North Carolina where I have a private practice. I am also a program consultant for Can Do Multiple Sclerosis.

Brian: All right. Thank you. Finally, we have Kathy Costello who is a Nurse Practitioner. Hi, Kathy.

Kathy Costello, MS, ANP-BC, MSCN: Hi, Brian. Hi, everyone. Thanks very much. Yes, I am Kathy Costello. I am a Nurse Practitioner and also the Associate Vice President for Health Care Access for the National MS Society.

Brian: All right. Thank you all for joining us. We hope this will be a good discussion between all these different professionals. To really get a broad view of what is going on and what we can do to help manage our lives here. My first question is for you, Kathy. We received a lot of questions from people who are concerned that their MS has made them

immunocompromised and, therefore, more at risk for coronavirus. Can you tell us what immunocompromised means for some with MS and how this might relate to Covid-19?

Kathy: Sure and thanks very much. This is really an important question and one that all of us are receiving frequently. There is a lot of fear out there around this because people with MS have heard that the problem with their multiple sclerosis is really a problem with their immune system. So the general thinking is that that must mean that my immune system is compromised in some way. Their immune system may be different and it is behaving differently causing them to have multiple sclerosis. But in terms of infection, having a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis does not increase someone's risk for developing Covid-19. Immunocompromised may occur because of other reasons. For instance, some of the disease-modifying therapies that people take for their MS may make them possibly more likely to develop any infection and Covid-19 would be included in that.

Having said that, they are not firm recommendations that people should stop their disease-modifying therapies or alter the dosing of their disease-modifying therapies. Because there are multiple factors involved in this aside from Covid-19. Where there may be a possible or theoretical risk that someone may be more likely to develop Covid-19, that is not confirmed and there are no data at this time to suggest that. Each decision regarding disease-modifying therapies needs to be made with that individual and his or her MS provider to discuss all of the factors that may be involved. For example, someone's age, or how long they have had MS, how active their MS might be, are some of the factors that need to be part of that conversation. So immunocompromised is a big loaded word. What we are most concerned about is someone who is actually immunosuppressed, meaning they do not have an immune system that can fight infection, that is not the case in multiple sclerosis.

Brian: Thank you, Kathy, for explaining that because I know that there are a lot of myths and concerns out there. Speaking of immunities, I wanted to ask, bring in Mona. Speaking of immunity, we received a lot of questions about food or supplements that maybe people can take that can help strengthen their immunity, can you speak a little bit about that? And maybe some of the myths around that that we should watch out for right now.

Mona: Sure. And you are right, there is a lot of misinformation out there going around. It is important to remember, Kathy said, speak to your MS provider to get your information. It is important to know that Doctor Google is not on your MS health care team. There is a lot of information going on around food and supplements to "boost your immune system". But it is important to know that your immune system is a very complex system. While nutrients do play a role in it, there is no one nutrient in isolation that is going to have an impact. So, for that reason, it is really important to make sure your diet is balanced and varied so that you bring as many nutrients to the table as you can to help support a healthy immune system.

Regarding supplements, there is no evidence because the Covid-19 virus is a novel meaning it is a new virus. We are still trying to figure it out so if Doctor Google is suggesting that a supplement or an eating pattern is going to have an impact here, it is not basing on any

scientific evidence. Regarding supplements, there are just two specific ones I want to mention - Zinc, a lot of people are suggesting that you supplement with Zinc, Zinc lozenges, and things. But it is really important to know that many of these things are dosed in an amount that far exceeds their recommended daily allowance. By taking these Zinc supplements, you can mask or contribute to other deficiencies, like iron specifically and that will not contribute to overall health. The same thing with Vitamin C, Vitamin C taking these things in mega doses can contribute to symptoms like upset stomach and just generally not contribute to good health. But all of these nutrients are available in foods and that is the way our body prefers to get nutrients because they are packaged in a way that our body can use them ideally. So I would encourage the getting of these nutrients from your food sources.

Brian: Roz?

Roz: Can I ask a follow-up question of Mona and then maybe of Kathy in follow-up? People are always thinking that they need to boost their immune system or make it stronger. From what you both have said, I think we want to be careful that people remember that their immune systems are not compromised. In fact, there is a lot of evidence that they are, in fact, overactive and that is contributing to getting MS. So, Mona, what should people think about when they see advertisements for supplements or anything that will boost their immune system?

Mona: Aside from what I said, initially, that there is no evidence to support that any nutrients in isolation will actually do that, it is really important for folks like us with MS that we get our antioxidants and our other nutrients in the dosage that they occur naturally in food. Unless you are trying to correct the deficiency that your physician or health care team has identified, like, for example, Vitamin D. Vitamin D plays a role in our health and we want to maintain on a healthy level that is monitored by our physicians. But taking more of anything is not going to be helpful generally. It can, in fact, cause symptoms, side effects, and interactions that are not going to contribute to overall health and well-being.

Brian: Great. Mandy, I would love to get your perspective as a PT. Can exercise help strengthen immunity? Anything from your perspective that people should think about if they are thinking about coronavirus. And especially from home, there are people that or used to exercising at gyms and health clubs, what can they do at home to better themselves during the situation?

Mandy: Thanks, Brian. Let me first start with how exercise and the immune system. We know that too little exercise is not good for our overall health but we also know that too much exercise is not good for our overall either. It is kind of finding that sweet spot of what is best for someone's body. So, in the context of our current environment, it is probably not a wise idea to try to up your exercise significantly at this point in time in an attempt to try to boost your immune system if you will. And to dovetail to what Mona and Kathy had commented on earlier and Roz also, that we do not want to make an immune system overly aggressive that is already acting a little bit over stimulated in the first place. So, finding that optimal amount of

exercise is what we would encourage for people.

Right now, the research suggests that one hundred and fifty minutes of moderate-intensity exercise and physical activities is what we advise and what we encourage. I think it is important to note that exercise does not just have to be what you do at the gym. Exercise and physical activity, more specifically, is everything we do over the course of the day. An exercise that you were prescribed by a physical therapist or perhaps a personal trainer, maybe focuses on specific outcomes, specific health, or fitness outcomes maybe becoming stronger or becoming more flexible. Whereas physical activity like I mentioned is all of the movement that we do during the day and that counts too, that counts to that one hundred and fifty minutes. So this can be folding clothes, this can be chasing after your kids, picking up toys, playing hide and seek with the kids. It can be cleaning your house, it can be all of that movement. It is still important and valuable.

Now, that aside, we all understand that exercise can really have a profound impact on how we feel over the course of the day how folks living with MS, how it makes them move better and feel differently. I think it is important to know we want people to keep exercising, even when they do not have access to those resources that you may have at a gym. So there are some online resources out there for still community-based exercise classes, I will name just a few: MSworkouts.com is one, MSforward.org. Those are some online video instruction exercise resources. There are certainly more available and we can post those on the Can Do MS website in the future so that you all can access that. Those are free.

That aside, there are also exercise resources that you can use that are online that often have a fee associated with them. But there are many exercise options out there but, again, do not forget that all of the movement that you do over the course of the day counts.

Brian: Yes, Roz?

Roz: So I have some questions for Mandy and that is, we know that it is a hundred and fifty minutes. But is that a day, a week, a month, a year? How often do people need to get that one hundred and fifty minutes in?

Mandy: Well, let us hope it is not every day because that will be a lot of movement, right? One hundred and fifty minutes per week. Thanks, Roz, for highlighting that important detail.

Roz: That is right. Also, everybody, do not forget that things like just taking two cans of soup in your hands and doing arm circles or raising them around actually get your heart rate up. So, before you start cooking that cans of soup, just whip it around--

Brian: Oh, yeah.

Mona: Do a few arm rings--

Mandy: Or turn on the music while you are cooking the soup and have a dance party.

Mona: There you go. Great ideas.

Brian: So, Roz, our homes are becoming gyms. They are becoming offices and families are spending a lot more time together under tight quarters, can you talk a little bit about how that might impact family dynamics? May be some tips for folks that are now spending a lot of time that they are not used to spending together.

Roz: It is too bad that my husband cannot be sitting here next to me contributing to this answer. Because he could probably tell you all the things that I am doing that are making him crazy. And then I can tell you all things that he is doing that is making me crazy.

I think it is really important, no matter how much space you have that you are living in to be aware that you are trying to adjust to a very different situation in your life than you have been used to day-to-day. All family members need to be able to share and express the feelings that they have and the concerns that they have about what is going on because we need that. We need to comfort each other and reassure each other and be comfortable together. But we also need distractions from all those feelings and fears. So, I would suggest whether you are in a big space or a small space that you think about group distractions from the things that worry you. Whether it is games, sing-alongs, dancing to that music that Mona was talking about while you are cooking. Putting together a puzzle, writing a story, you can have one family member who starts the story, and then the next person does the next little bit and then the next person so you come up with a nonsense story that makes you all laugh. You need those kinds of together activities that are soothing and fun. But each person also needs to have individual soothing activities. Because what is going to be beneficial for each person is different, right? Some of us need to put on earphones and listen to loud music. Others of us need to go and do some exercise in a corner. And others might need to read or meditate or pray. Again, it is finding group activities that bring you together and solitary activities that allow you to have a peaceful space.

We also need to prepare and this is true whether we have MS or we do not have MS. It is true whether there is a Covid-19 hovering around us or not. We all tend to take out our emotions, particularly negative emotions, on those who are in easy range and those with whom we feel safest. So, everybody in this hall or on this webinar has had the experience of taking out a temper on a spouse or a kid, when it really had nothing to do with that spouse or that child. But they are there and we feel safe doing that. That is going to happen more in this kind of very close, tense environment and anxious situations. It is important, in fact, it is essential to apologize when that happens, to acknowledge that it has happened and as best as possible to bring some humor to bear. So that you could get past that really tense moment. Humor is going to help a lot. It is going to lighten a really scary situation. So, together time, effort time, openness about your feelings, and lots of apologies.

Mandy: Can I add one thing?

Brian: Okay, Mandy. Go ahead.

Mandy: Something that we have found successful in our house with three children was we all need our time outs once in a while. And we have been putting ourselves in timeouts. So it is not uncommon if Mommy will say, "Hey, kids, I need a time out for a bit." And now James, my oldest son, is like, "Mommy, I think you need a time out for a little bit." But just acknowledging feelings and acknowledging when people need their time alone. So, I like how you said that Roz.

Brian: Thanks, Mandy. And, Roz, it seems that a lot of the stress that may percolate just comes from everyone in the family is different. Some people may have different tolerances to the virus. Some people may have different concerns or anxieties. What tips would give for families to balance those different levels of tolerance?

Roz: It is a great question, Brian. I think everybody is really struggling with this right now. We all have different tolerance for risks but I think we have to look to the experts right now. I would strongly urge you to pick a trusted resource and stick to that. For example, in our house, we trust and believe in the information that Dr. Fauci, who is an epidemiological expert, is giving to all of us including the people in the federal government. He is consistently giving people advice, so in our house, that is kind of our situation. Then we try to take that information and translate it as best as we can into the daily behavior that will provide the most protection.

Now, we are going to see the differences generationally in how people cope with risk. I think some of us have been alive and around longer and live through maybe a polio epidemic, or flu epidemic, or other things will tend to take this more seriously. We lived through them and have seen the impact that they can have. So we are more ready to listen to the recommendations to us, isolate ourselves, stay in the house, and just hunker down. Whereas we are seeing with teenagers or even some young adults that everybody including the federal government is having difficulty getting them to listen to the message. Stop socializing. Stop congregating. This is not just about you. This is about the impact of you not isolating on everybody else. So even within a family, we may see conflict over who is ready to hunker down and stay put and who is feeling like no they need to go out and socialize. Within each family, you are going to have to sit down, talk about it, listen to the experts, and then do the very best you can to isolate as much as possible. Though I think that is one piece of this. But the only piece of it is that we need to be aware that as we try to protect each other that sometimes that will lead to the kinds of conflicts I was talking about before.

So, when my husband talked about it this morning one example he gave was my telling him to wash his hands for the four hundred and fifty-seventh time since he got up in the morning. He has a tendency to bring out some tension in the household. So he has to respond, he has to understand that I am trying to protect him and I am trying to follow the practices, but he also has to be able to breathe. So, we have to be aware of how we juggle our individual

tolerance for risk.

Brian: Great point. Thank you, Roz. Kathy, speaking of isolation and quarantining, what are you recommending right now to folks specifically should people keep their medical appointments if their offices are even open? Should they get non-emergency care at the same decision point that they are used to? Or is it a new point that people should think about? What are you recommending for staying in and that those risk against going out?

Kathy: Sure. Thanks so much, Brian. These recommendations have evolved over the last several weeks. As the numbers of cases in the United States and the rest of the world have increased, these recommendations have become much more strict. And what I am about to say is not specific to multiple sclerosis, this is specific to everyone because everyone is at risk for infection. It does not matter if you MS or not. Many municipalities now are changing their recommendations to shelter in place which essentially means, stay home, stay in. Unless it is absolutely necessary for you to leave your house, stay in. That has not been made a rule, a law, or a firm recommendation everywhere. My recommendation is that is our best foot forward. We will have an enormous health care crisis in this country if we can't stem the tide and slow the process of people getting this infection. There is not enough critical care beds and ventilators, we all have been hearing this. It is the truth. So for fewer people to be infected at one time is critically important for every one of us to remain as healthy as possible. And if we do get this infection, to recover from this infection. I recommend that people do their best to stay in.

In terms of their appointments, many offices are postponing or canceling routine follow up visits. Many are going to virtual visits, particularly for those routine needs. So that you can have a tele-video visit where you can explain what is going on. You can hear from your provider. You could see your provider face to face and get recommendations or lay some of your anxieties, for example. It is important to know if those visits are going to be handled differently with your insurance coverage, although most right now are covering them as they would other visits as well. So before someone goes to an appointment, call ahead. Call ahead and make sure that that appointment is necessary, or is there another alternative. If you believed that you have been infected with coronavirus, it is also important to call. And in that case, you are calling your primary care provider.

Most offices and systems now have processes in place and instructions in place for what you should do if you believed that you have been infected. In fact, they may even send you to a different group of providers who will triage and assess the symptoms that you are having and then give you recommendations on what to do. So, stay home, stay in unless it is absolutely necessary to go out and what is essential. If you need to get groceries, if you need to go to the pharmacy, space these trips out so that you are doing them as infrequently as possible, and if it is a medical appointment, call ahead. Make sure that appointment needs to happen. Can it happen virtually? And if you absolutely need to be seen, what are the instructions that you need to follow in order to make that happen?

Roz: Kathy, can I just ask a follow-up question? Because we used to get this all the time before there was any coronavirus issue. How does a person with MS, let us say who is at the start of a new flare-up or exacerbation, how does that person know if he or she is experiencing an emergency MS related?

Kathy: Yeah and sometimes it is very difficult to assess that on your own and that is where that calling ahead is important. Some places have an electronic medical record with a patient portal, where you can ask questions electronically. Some may even have set up a hotline at this point where you can call in order to ask those urgent questions. While an MS exacerbation is terrible for people to experience, it is often not a medical, life-threatening emergency. It may feel like it. I am not in any way trying to minimize that but I think we have to keep this in perspective with the crisis that we are dealing with. And that the most important thing that people can do is contact their health care provider for instructions. Explain what is going on as best as you can. In fact, I recommend writing down what you are experiencing so that when you get on that call and your anxiety level has increased that you are able to explain succinctly what is happening. So that you can get the best advice for your situation.

Roz: Great. Thank you.

Brian: Speaking of appointments, Mandy, I want to ask you specifically with PT. So many people rely on that routine and getting that care from a physical therapist. With many PT offices being closed, what are you recommending to people still get those benefits of PT but not being able to come in?

Mandy: Sure, yeah. It can be difficult because sometimes physical therapy not only offers that physical opportunity to move and to move differently with different equipment than perhaps you can have access to at home. But it also is that emotional experience as well that can give people a lot of confidence and a lot of joy. You are right, Brian. A lot of PT offices are shutting down and not allowing people to come in for visits. So some alternatives and some options would be first and foremost, as Kathy spoke about with other health care providers, would be to call your PT and have a conversation with him or her and identify what exercises, what activities can be adapted, or can be continued in the home safely and effectively.

The good thing is, is we do have access to some types of resources like video conferencing and other types of platforms in addition to just telephone that we can guide people through different movements and different instructions. I should comment however, many insurances do not cover PT, virtually. So that may be a cost that you would have to incur if you would want to choose to do ongoing PT sessions virtually. So, again, I would start with just a telephone conversation, if that can progress into a few visits via a video conference platform, that would be great too. Otherwise, you can always have your exercises mailed to you through the postal service as well and that can be another option. I would also add - the good thing is you may have a lot more family members at home and there is a lot of opportunity in this type of a circumstance where you can do more physical activity together as a family, or

maybe somebody can help you with some exercises at home that maybe they were not able to do prior to this situation. So, think outside of the box and use that PT to help you find those most optimal solutions.

Brian: Right. Oh, Mona.

Mona: I just wanted to also mention that I know in my state, BlueCross BlueShield, is now extending coverage to dietitians for telehealth, and so, in the state where you are in, should you need to speak or want to speak with a dietitian and you have insurance coverage benefits that include nutrition, working with a dietitian that may be covered under your insurance now as a result of this virus. So just check with your dietitian or your insurance provider.

Mandy: And that could be changing or stay as this continues. Yes. Thanks, Mona.

Brian: That is great. Mona, I actually had a question for you. Kathy mentioned that stay in as much as possible, but one place where most of us still have to go to is the grocery store and that can create a lot of anxiety right now. Do you recommend any extra precautions with going to the grocery store and shopping and also preparing foods like produce in a way that maybe we were not doing before?

Mona: Yes, Brian, that is an important question. And I appreciate that. I think I am going to just start with the process of going to the grocery store when I talk about this. So, if you are an elderly person or you are at a higher risk, many stores I know in my area are designating certain hours to be for those kinds of shoppers to make the crowds less dense, so shopping at those times would be ideal. There is also shopping online, so all you do is pick them up. So, those are things that I would encourage you to take advantage of. If you are going into the store, though they are still the grocery cart. Most stores have the sanitizer that you can wipe off the handle of the cart, I would encourage you to do that. I would encourage anybody who finds at the grocery store that salad bars are still stocked and the reach-in cookie bins are still stocked, I would avoid those, for now, sneeze guards are not really going to be the ultimate protector of this at this time.

In my town, I went to many stores yesterday and everybody has pretty much stopped stocking those things. But in case you happen upon a salad bar, I would keep walking at this point. And then, when you are in the produce aisle, it is important to know that when we are looking at oranges and things, we are picking this one up and we are putting it back. So, it is entirely likely that more people have been touching the produce than you may imagine. So, it is important to put them in a bag, a plastic produce bag and when you get home, definitely wash your produce. This is something that I would always encourage washing your produce, hard things like oranges, apples, cantaloupes, you want to definitely watch the outside of those things. And then when it comes to lettuce, like greens and things of that sort, wash it the way you normally would.

I have had a number of questions regarding, "What if I took some salad from the salad bar or

some produce that was touched by somebody?" If you wash it the way you normally do and then you consume it, and it goes through your digestive system that is not how this virus is transferred. So the pH in your digestive system is likely going to kill whatever is in there. But if you were to say inhale your salad, which I would not encourage anybody to do, that might be a different story because the respiratory way that this is transmitted. So, no inhaling the salad via the nose, do not do that.

But going back to Home Ec, if anybody remembers Home Ec. When you have your boxes, your cereal boxes and your cans of soup, there is no need to wash the outsides of the boxes necessarily. If you want to do that, it is not an overprotective thing, if it makes you feel better, that is fine. But it has always been the case if you have a can of tomato soup, to wipe the lid, clean before you put the can opener because it is kind of like if you have a dirty cantaloupe. Imagine that, you have a dirty cantaloupe and you cut through it, whatever's on the outside has just been put on the inside. So, if you have dirt or something on the outside of your canned food, and you put the can opener in and you open it is like putting whatever is on the lid inside the can. So, that has always been a best practice but now is a really good time to remind us to do that. So, wash the outside of your cans and some people find it a really good practice to just go ahead and do that when you get home from the grocery store.

So, if you have been to the grocery store and you are now coming home, I have had the question of whether I should use paper bags, plastic bags, bags from home. If you or somebody who I do, I have dogs and so I use my plastic bags for poop scooping, I would encourage you if you are using plastic grocery bags just go ahead and throw them out at this time. Keeping them may not be a good idea. Paper may be a good idea. But if you use your own bags, just make sure to wash them after using them so that when you go to the store next time you are using clean bags, and then finally, when you get home from the grocery store, do not put the bags on the counter because the bags that have been in the cart and then in the trunk of your car and perhaps on the floor, putting them on the counter is not a good idea. So unload everything from the floor to the counter, wash, wipe, put them away. And yes, I think that just about covers it, but basically, eat a balanced diet full of foods that can be had from the refrigerated section, freezer section, canned food section, everywhere in the store, just be safe.

Roz: So, I would like to add one thing to that and call me if you disagree, Mona, but I think one of the things we are being warned about all the time, is that we, humans, touch our faces much more often than we think we do. So, one of the things, I think, has been helpful for me, wearing plastic doesn't protect you but it does remind you not to touch your face. So, if you go to the grocery store and you are touching things, you are reaching things off the shelf and you put them in your cart and you have gloves in your hand, it just helps to signal you not to touch your face so that you are not taking the germs from the shelves and getting them all over here.

Mona: And the one thing that I would say to that is not everyone has access to those gloves at home. So if you are fortunate to have hand sanitizer with you, one of the pocket or purse size

when you grocery shop, absolutely you can do that hand sanitizer multiple times throughout the grocery shopping experience. But if you can't get gloves, you know, I wash my hands before I go, I hand sanitize, I do the carts, I bring my things home and unload appropriately then I wash my hands. I mean, just wash your hands. You can't say that enough. Wash your hands a lot, and try not to, like Roz says, sometimes we touch our face more than we are aware of it. But if you are hand sanitizing and washing your hands, I can't imagine that it is going to be a problem that is going to interfere with the average grocery shopper. I mean, Kathy may disagree or have something to add to that.

Kathy: Yes, no, I completely agree with the hand sanitizer. Although hand sanitizer is hard to come by right now, I will say that there is a number of DIY, Do It Yourself hand sanitizer recipes, and the key is to make sure that they are 60% alcohol, that is the key to killing COVID. And using it frequently, can't be overstated, honestly. And one thing, Mona and I wanted to add to what you were saying about produce, for instance. A lot of produce is available already packaged, meaning that it is in a container of some sort either a plastic container or a plastic bag, which certainly could be rinsed. It is not to say it is never been touched, it is probably been touched plenty. But the time element that's been involved in when it was touched to when it gets to you has been extended versus the people in the store who are touching and putting it back, touching and bringing it home. That is active. That is right now. That is why they cough, they sneeze and now they have touched. So, while you still need to wash your produce, I think there might be a little less risk in that produce that is already pre-packaged.

Mona: And the people who have touched the pre-packaged product-- that is a lot of Ps. The people who have touched the pre-packaged produce were done under a controlled environment, whereas the produce section at any grocery store is not a terribly controlled environment.

Brian: Great. Thank you. So I have one more question. And I am going to actually open it up to the whole panel. And that is about isolation and being alone, indoors so much has so many trickle-down effects. So, I would love to ask each of you just what tips you could offer to help people for being alone and isolated for so long during this time. So, I am going to start with Roz and her perspective as a psychologist.

Roz: Well, thanks, Brian. And I think in some ways, this is the toughest question of all. I was never quite so aware of how social a being I am until all of this happened. And I have discovered that I need people, I need contact, I need conversation. And in the absence of that, our anxiety grows, right? So this is really a dual question. When we feel isolated and nobody to comfort us or soothe us or keep us company, that is when our worries tend to multiply and get bigger. So, first thing's first, please do not binge on the news. There are some people who are just absolutely addicted to turning it on in the morning and watching it until they go to bed at night. I do not think that is helpful for any of us at this point. It is very repetitive generally. And so I think what you want to do, again, is pick one source that you trust, whatever that one source is that you are comfortable with and you check in once a day, maybe twice a day, and the rest of the time, you binge on something much more fun. Binge

on old movies, binge on TV series you have not had a chance to watch. Binge on music, you will never get a chance to sit and listen to or engage in any other activity that suits you. For some people, it is painting or music or meditation or yoga or trying something you have never tried before. I recently started learning to paint on my own because I never tried it before and now I have time. These things can be very, very, very soothing, whether you are alone or whether you are with others.

In terms of isolation, I think we need to find as many different ways to connect with important people as we possibly can. We have discovered in our house that we are now, in some ways, maintaining more contact than ever before with people we have not had a chance to be with. So, we have set up a virtual cocktail hour before dinner, right? So, we get online and we sit with friends across the country many nights of the week and just visit with them. And you do not have to have a glass of wine if you do not want to, but it is a time to gather and be social. And if there are some online platforms where you can actually do it with several people at once. So I would explore all of your options for staying connected.

E-mail is wonderful. Now it does not just have to be for work. Now you can e-mail news, you can check in on people you love. If you are not sure how to use all this technology, ask your kids because they're home bothering you, so you might as well engage them to teach you how to do these things and make the most use of whatever tools you have. I am learning from my eight and ten-year-old grandchildren, that my iPhone has capacities that I did not know it had. So, as we spend time together during the day, they are putting masks over their faces and making me laugh, but it is all from the phone, right? Suddenly my granddaughter is turning from a panda into a squirrel to a rabbit to a ghost. So, have the kids teach you and connect that way in as many ways as you can.

Brian: That is great. Thank you, Roz. Mona, what would you recommend for people dealing with isolation from your perspective?

Mona: A couple of things. I want to start with making sure if you live somewhere where you can safely check on your neighbors, that is really important because there are a lot of folks, I know in my neighborhood, we utilize the next door-- I do not know if that is available everywhere. But it is a way to kind of keep in touch with folks in the neighborhood, who might not be able to get out to the grocery store in a safe way. So, making sure that you check in on people that is important. But also it is important because I know as a nutrition professional, that food can sometimes be used as a coping tool for anxieties and I just wanted to address that real briefly. First of all, it is important to recognize that it works which is why you need to honor that and recognize that and not beat yourself up for it. But it may come to a point where you want to start listing the pros if I am turning to food for comfort, what are the pros? What benefits is this providing me? But it is also important to maybe consider the cons, what are the potential negative impacts of engaging and comforting myself with food? What are the potential negative impacts on my health?

And at that point, because it is the frequency that it is going to become a problem if you are

turning to food to soothe your anxiety or your loneliness, or your boredom or your anger or your fear all the time, then that is going to at some point, have a negative impact on your health. So, it might be really important to remember that although it is a good tool, it is there for a reason, it does serve us but it is important to make sure you put other tools in the toolbox. So, like Roz said, FaceTime. Reach out to family and friends, engage in hobbies that you have not had time to do, watch a movie, I love audible books on tape. So, take a walk, and listen to a book on tape, reach out to your mental health practitioner. Or if alone time is what you need because your family is so close now, go somewhere quiet and read a book. These are things you can do if you are responding to your feelings of anxiety and fear as opposed to hunger. So, it is really important to recognize that feeling. You need to honor your feelings and sit with your feelings but learn to try to put other tools in the toolbox to help you respond to them.

Roz: And in line with that, I did suggest that you could have a virtual glass of wine with friends and neighbors. But to Mona's point, just make sure your cocktail hour does not go on too long. You just have a brief visit, you will enjoy it, and then you go cook your healthy dinner that Mona has advised you about.

Mona: Yes, to quiet down.

Brian: Mandy, how about you? What tips would you offer to people that are isolated right now?

Mandy: Well, it may come as no surprise, but my advice would be to try to cope with that feeling of isolation with movement, with exercise, with physical activity. So, maybe you went for a walk with your friends three times a week, maybe rather than being able to walk with that friend, maybe you talk on the phone while you are walking with them. And if that is not safe, because maybe balance is an issue or dual-tasking like that is an issue then maybe you call that friend for a pre-walk pep talk before you go and he or she goes. Another option would be, again, you can make time with your family and with your kids physically active. So, maybe you do a scavenger hunt around your yard. So, you guys get the opportunity to get outside and get a little bit of movement. You can also schedule your movement and your exercise with a friend to avoid isolation, maybe rather than working nonstop all day from home, you schedule some stretching opportunities with a friend that you do via a virtual platform. So, I think again, it is figuring out different ways to connect with people through movement, using technology, and using that safe distance that the CDC and others are recommending.

Roz: So, Kathy, and Mandy, this is a question for both of you. So, in Italy, where they have a very, very serious problem right now, they have basically outlawed walking outside or walking your dog outside. So, could you talk about can people not take a walk with somebody else if they maintain that six feet of distance between them as they walk? Kathy, what do you think is the right answer to that?

Kathy: So, this kind of goes back to what I was mentioning earlier that in some municipalities it is - stay in, period. It is "stay in" unless you have some extremely important reason to be outside. And so, that is pretty severe, right? But that is often what it will take. It is not everywhere, but it will likely be more and more places. I was actually writing a little few notes since my time to provide some tips were coming up. And I was thinking that not all of us have much space in our houses, I certainly do not. I did exercises last night where I was doing lunges, and I was going around my sofa because there was not a lot of space. But it was kind of fun to do it because my daughter was also doing that in her home in Takoma Park, Maryland. And so, we were together to some extent but we were inside. And so, I think we have to attend to what the rules are, what the recommendations are in our area, and consider that. But I think that there are ways that we can create something that was not even there before that can be kind of fun.

Mona: And there is always that opportunity for the dance party again, right?

Kathy: Absolutely.

Mona: And get your friends right after that cocktail hour, right?

Brian: Hey, like top grade.

Mona: And then you can virtually cook dinner together, everybody share recipes and get in the kitchen, FaceTime while you are cooking dinner. So, yes.

Brian: Kathy, do you have any other tips or thoughts about isolation or any other tips you want to provide people?

Kathy: Yes, so some of these all sound familiar, but I think some repetition is not such a bad thing. I would say stay informed, know what is going on in your community, know what recommendations have been made. I agree with Roz that you should not spend your days on MSNBC and CNN and Fox News because they are new shows and keep that in mind that they are very, very repetitive of the same information and it can make your anxiety level, whatever level that is. It will make it go up. There is no doubt about it. But using those credible sources, the CDC is a very credible source. Our nonprofit can do MS, the National MS Society, the consortium of MS centers, Multiple Sclerosis International Federation, MSAA, MSIF, all of these organizations are putting credible information on their websites, I would recommend checking there. In fact, it is also going to have information about MS and COVID-19 which is important and of interest to people living with MS.

If you have questions about your MS, you are experiencing new symptoms, you are having a return of old symptoms, you are worried about what to do around your disease-modifying therapy. Ask, you need to ask your provider, you need to either ask for that electronic medical record patient portal over the phone. If you are having trouble reaching your provider for some reason, they closed down a practice which would be unusual but in the realm of

possibilities. Contact the national MS Society, MS Navigator for assistance with what you need to do in that case.

We are in a new normal, right? And it is a normal that is trying to establish itself, it is still changing pretty rapidly. But we all function well, when we have a routine. And our routines have been completely blown out of the water right now. And we are trying to establish a new routine that has to include our activity level, our diet, our interaction with others, and we are worried. We had a woman with MS ask us if she could physically comfort her child for fear of somehow contracting some condition. We require as human beings connections with others, and we need to connect and we need to touch each other. Now there is going to be times when someone is suffering from a COVID-19 infection where that is not going to be possible. But when people do not have that infection and you are living in the household, and you are under these strict conditions, you need to touch each other, and comfort each other, because this is terrible. This is a terrible time for us. And we are all wondering what is going to happen next. Not even tomorrow. But, goodness, what are we going to do here in the next hour. So, being a comfort to one another is really critical for all of us to keep our sanity. And to keep our humaneness. We need to contact people we have not contacted in a long time. Here is your opportunity, you have put it off, you have put it off, you have been busy, contact that person and have a conversation, whether it is by phone, or Skype or FaceTime. But I think it is important for people to really be able to connect.

Get your rest. It is important to have a good night's rest to be resilient. We all need to marshal our resilience in this really uncertain time. And when we are tired, we just do not have the wherewithal to do it. If you are having trouble sleeping, that is important to note and probably contact your primary care provider to talk about what kinds of strategies might be able to help you with your sleep. Check out those sites that I mentioned that are that are providing good information. There are a number of webinars that each of those organizations are providing that give you up to date information as well as an opportunity to ask questions.

And, finally, be kind and be thankful. It is hard right now to be thankful. But if every day we can think about really with our loved ones, what can we be thankful for? What are we thankful for today? It really goes a long way to helping us maintain a calm and a peace through this most uncertain and anxiety-provoking time.

Roz: And one other thought, all of you who are listening, who have been living with MS for a while you guys are masters at dealing with unpredictability. You are masters at being creative problem solvers, you have had a lot of history with this. Use the skills that you have used to deal with your MS in the past. Bring those strengths to bear, that also helps increase your resilience. You know a lot about how to handle crises and how to step up when things are changing or difficult. Work with each other, as partners in your families, problem solve the way you have been doing for a very long time. All of us are learning a lot from you as well about how to manage difficult challenges in our lives and unpredictability. So, thank you, all of you, for teaching us along the way.

Kathy: And if you need a reminder, look yourself in the mirror and say, "You know what? I am good at this. I am good at this." And remind yourself that - "Darn it, you are good at this." And not only are you good at it for yourself, but you are likely to be able to help those that are in your own home and those that you are connecting with.

Brian: Well, I appreciate everyone's time and their thoughts. I am thankful to have such a great team and to have the technology to bring everyone together virtually. We hope you found this useful and you gain some strategies and resources. For more information, as Kathy mentioned, please visit the Can Do MS website at cando-ms.org and the National MS Society which is nationalmssociety.org. We are going to continue to put strategies and content on there to help us all get through this time. So, thank you all for joining us. And we hope that you stay healthy and safe and we will talk to you soon. Take care now.

[End]