

# EMBRACE AGING

News from the RTOERO Foundation: Helping you stay connected and engaged

—  
**From the desk of**  
**Joanne Murphy**  
- Board Chair -



## Social Isolation Awareness Month Thank You

The majority of us will see a return to normalcy when we come out on the other side of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, for socially isolated seniors the end of the pandemic does not mean an end to loneliness – social isolation is their normal.

In our fall newsletter, I asked you to imagine what it would be like if there were no end in sight to social isolation. As well, I asked you to help shine a light on the issue of social isolation by participating in our third annual *Social Isolation Awareness Month* campaign.

Our campaign wrapped up on October 31st. Together we have made huge strides in the fight against social isolation. Many people signed up for the weekly challenges. These were designed to help raise awareness of and help identify those who are socially isolated. The challenges led to an exploration of community resources that are available to support lonely and socially isolated seniors. The last challenge was more of a personal exercise for participants. I asked you to assess your own risk of becoming socially isolated and to reflect on steps you can take to reduce or prevent these risks in the future.

This year, our challenge was to raise \$100,000 to support the RTOERO Foundation's annual grant program. We are humbled and impressed by the way RTOERO members rose to the occasion in a truly impressive fashion.

The campaign has so far raised \$85,313 which was made possible in large part by generous donations from members. These funds will be granted to social isolation research projects in 2021. The data collected in these research projects is critical in helping to overcome the risks of being socially isolated.

If you want to help us reach our fundraising goal by the end of the year, please contact Deanna at 1-800-361-9888 ext.271.

We extend our sincere thanks and gratitude for the selfless generosity of all the RTOERO members who supported the campaign in many different ways. Because of you, we are one step closer to better and healthier futures for all of us as we age.

Stay safe!

## Welcome to our first 8-page newsletter

You might have been curious about why the envelope you received this in was so bulky. Well, now you know - you're holding in your hands the first ever eight-page newsletter from the RTOERO Foundation.

We simply had too much content that we were excited to share with you and couldn't fit it all in our standard publication. So we made the decision to double its size, just for the winter edition.

It's the end of the year, and a good time to report back to you on what's been keeping us busy. It's also a chance to hear from some of our partners like Dr. Paula Rochon, the RTOERO Chair in Geriatric Medicine, whose incredible work makes such an impact on the lives of all of us as we age. And from some of the other partners like HearingLife and Lumino whose generous support helps the Foundation continue our work.

We are honoured to share this inaugural, expanded newsletter with you and truly hope you enjoy it.

We would also like to take this opportunity to wish you happy holidays. However you celebrate and whoever you celebrate with, please remember to stay safe and healthy. Like everything else in 2020, the holidays will be a bit different than every other year. But that doesn't mean it can't be fun and special in its own "weirdest year ever" kind of way.

From all your friends at the RTOERO Foundation, have a happy, healthy and memorable holiday season.



## COVID-19 appeal update

Back in June we sent out a letter that told you the story of a very thoughtful and generous donor. She planned to donate her COVID-19 assistance cheque from the federal government to the RTOERO Foundation. We asked you to consider joining her – and you have!



The impact of social isolation has been especially exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic and through your generosity we're able to support more seniors as they strive to stay active and engaged.

Your actions have proven once again that our members and donors are people of compassion and action. You have let isolated and lonely seniors know that they are not alone.

Thank you!



## Rebuilding long-term care from the ground up

By **Dr. Paula Rochon, Dr. Nathan Stall**  
and **Barbara Miszkiel**

Long-term care (LTC) homes have borne the brunt of COVID-19, putting them at the forefront of public attention and discourse. As such, we have an unprecedented opportunity to think creatively about how to provide LTC residents with the best medical and social care. One area that has not been fully considered is how the design of long-term care homes impacts the care of its residents.

So how do we change LTC homes for the better? Most LTC home residents live there because they need to and the majority are women of advanced age, often with dementia, who can no longer be cared for in their own homes. On average their life expectancy is short and for most, it will be their last place of residence. Providing a home that balances health and wellness is essential to giving these residents the quality of life they deserve.

First, homes should be designed so that residents have private rooms. Evidence shows that private rooms reduce anxiety, improve sleep and are overwhelmingly preferred. Private rooms are also one way to mitigate the spread of infectious diseases.

Second, we should work to cluster residents into smaller groupings of only 10 to 12 residents per floor – this is particularly important for those with dementia who do better in smaller social groupings.

Third, spaces must be designed to increase social interaction and stimulation, which are important factors in maintaining cognition and promoting well-being. Connecting with nature also has great



value in this regard. For example, inner courtyards allow residents with dementia to wander in gardens without getting lost and create spaces where family can be welcomed.

While these examples were not created to address current challenges resulting from COVID-19, private rooms, smaller clusters of residents and access to outdoor space all lead to better infection prevention and control.

In homes where these design elements are already in place, residents have had better outcomes during COVID-19.

We must apply an interdisciplinary lens that brings together geriatricians, architects, families and our provincial authorities to rebuild long-term care – creating homes where older adults not only live, but where they can thrive.

**Paula Rochon** is a geriatrician, Vice-President of Research at Women's College Hospital and the RTOERO Chair in Geriatric Medicine at the University of Toronto.

**Nathan Stall** is a geriatrician and Research Fellow at Women's College Research Institute and the University of Toronto.

**Barbara Miszkiel** is a Director of HDR's healthcare practice and an award winning architect.

# Health & Wellness

## Dealing with stress and anxiety this holiday season

Article courtesy of **Lumino Health**

It's a season of traditions, pastimes and gathering with the ones you love. But for some people, the holidays also bring about stress and anxiety.

Registered psychologist Katie Turner has shared some tips with us for how to manage difficult feelings this holiday season.

Turner says December and January are the busiest months for therapists. The reasons people can struggle at this time of year vary, from busy schedules to family tensions or loneliness.

This year, there may be more stress as COVID-19 evolves, making traditional gatherings more challenging.

If you can't be near all of your loved ones, Turner suggests thinking of other ways to stay in touch. "Have conversations to find ways to connect in a way that everyone is comfortable with." She recommends ensuring that virtual visits are an option as a way to reinvent some holiday traditions. We know that no matter how much you prepare, the holiday season can still be stressful.

Some stress is normal and even healthy, Turner says. It's how our bodies react to change and pressure and it gets us ready to take action. But if stress becomes too much or continues for too long, it can cause physical and mental health problems, she adds.

Watch for signals that your stress levels are becoming hard to manage. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) says to pay attention to the following symptoms if and when they occur:

- trouble with memory
- excessive worrying
- moodiness
- sadness
- headaches
- social withdrawal

If you're feeling stressed or anxious, there is help. **Lumino Health**, an innovation from Sun Life, has created a **Stress & Anxiety Guide** with resources and expert advice. For one-on-one support, you can book an appointment directly with a psychologist on the website: [luminohealth.sunlife.ca/s/stress-and-anxiety-resources](https://luminohealth.sunlife.ca/s/stress-and-anxiety-resources)

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## Cranberries for better eye health

Eye care is something that we often take for granted. But as we age, we are at risk for age-related vision diseases such as macular degeneration, cataracts and diabetic retinopathy.

Eyes are the most sensitive organ in the body and are easily susceptible to damage. Our eyes are under constant strain from various sources including excessive television and computer screen time, sunlight and the negative effect of free radicals. So, our eyes need the same attention we give our heart, our digestive tract and every other organ and system in our bodies.

Concerns about eye health increase as it begins to decline over the years. But there are simple things we can do to care for our eyes including eating a balanced diet. Cranberries are especially beneficial to the eyes as they are loaded with antioxidants and are a potent source of vitamin C.

Vitamin C is an antioxidant that provides the eyes with protection from free radical damage that causes the breakdown of healthy cells in the body. Vitamin C also assists in promoting healthy connective tissue and collagen found in the cornea of the eyes. Additionally, the free radical fighting properties of cranberries safeguard the health of eye cells and keep the visual system healthy.

So cranberries are not just for the holidays - add them to salads, smoothies, eat them dried or drink them up for healthier eyes.



## Legacy giving: building the future of the Foundation



You live life with purpose. You are proactive about your health and you are involved in your community. You care about the future of the RTOERO Foundation and its mission to enhance the quality of life for older adults in Canada.

A legacy gift - a planned gift in your will - is a lasting statement of your generosity and an opportunity to say that you believe in a better future for all of us as we age.

There are different ways to remember the RTOERO Foundation in your will. You can designate a specific dollar amount or a percentage of your total assets. You can also leave a gift of life insurance or donate securities like stocks and bonds. Your lawyer, accountant, financial planner or insurance agent can help determine what kind of planned gift would be best for you, your family and your estate.

A gift in your will is one of the most significant and lasting gifts you can leave for future generations. For more information on how you can create your lasting legacy with the RTOERO Foundation, feel free to contact us. We're here to help you achieve your philanthropic goals in way that is meaningful for you. You are never under any pressure or obligation, and our discussion will be held in the strictest confidence.

Please call Mike Prentice, Executive Director of the RTOERO Foundation at 1-800-361-9888 ext. 285 to start the conversation.

## Taxes and end-of-year giving

The month of December often gives us pause to reflect on the past year and the impact we've had on the lives of others. For many Canadians, December is also the time of year to show their generosity towards those in need. In fact, 31% of annual giving occurs in December, and 12% of all charitable donations are made in the last three days of the year.

Giving to the RTOERO Foundation not only benefits seniors across Canada, it's also a great way to maximize your tax credits.

If charitable giving is still on your 2020 to-do list, your gift must be post-marked by December 31, 2020 to qualify for a tax receipt.

The RTOERO Foundation is a registered Canadian charity. Our Charitable Registration Number is 848662110RR0001 and we issue a tax receipt for all gifts of \$20 or more. Please feel free to use the donation form and return postage paid envelope enclosed in this newsletter.

Thank you in advance for your generous support.



### DID YOU KNOW?

**Cash and gifts of securities qualify for charitable tax credits.**

**Your charitable donation receipt is applied against your income tax, so it can be used to reduce what you owe the government.**

## Update on our 2020 grant program

The RTOERO Foundation's 2019/2020 grant program encountered delays due to COVID-19. The typical cycle of the program begins in January with submissions to our "Call for Expressions of Interest".

Following stringent review by the peer review committee a small number of organizations are shortlisted and asked to submit full proposals. Final decisions are made and grants are awarded in the Spring.

This year, however, we made the difficult decision to put the program on hold. Many of the shortlisted organizations were too focused on pandemic relief to organize new projects and submit proposals. But we are pleased to announce that the program is now back on track.

Our peer review committee will meet at the end of November to review the submissions and the winners will be announced in early 2021.

A hundred thousand dollars in donor-generated funding will be awarded to projects which focus on the impact of social isolation and loneliness on friend and family caregivers. These caregivers are defined as individuals providing informal and unpaid care - typically to seniors over 65 years of age.

Caregivers can face physical and emotional strain as well as financial and social burdens. These grants will ensure research is performed in this important and emerging area of senior's health and wellness.

## How to overcome communication barriers in a pandemic

Article courtesy of **HearingLife**

Face masks play a crucial role in preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, but they can be an additional obstacle if you have hearing loss. Many of those who struggle to hear rely on lip reading to fill in the communication gaps – a reliance that is less effective now that masks are mandatory in public spaces. Even for those without a hearing impairment, speaking through a mask or behind a protective barrier can make words sound garbled and difficult to understand.

So, what can you do to work around the communication barriers that the pandemic has created? Here are four tips to help you navigate the “new normal.”

### **Hearing tip 1: Use non-verbal communication strategies.**

Use hand gestures to greet or point to where you are going or what you are trying to get as you speak. You can also prepare a note or message indicating you cannot hear well when masks are worn so others will be more apt to help.

There are even text transcription and voice amplification apps that can improve your communications with others. Try Google Gboard or Transcribe by downloading them on your phone.

### **Hearing tip 2: Wear a clear mask or face shield.**

In order to make your lips visible during conversation, you can try using a clear mask or face shield. This may not solve the issue of muffled speech, but it will allow lip reading to be an additional tool for communication.

### **Hearing tip 3: Don't be afraid to ask others to repeat themselves.**

Even someone without hearing issues may find themselves asking for repetition during the pandemic—there are masks and walls of plexiglass in our way!

When we ask others to repeat themselves, they tend to do so at a slightly louder volume and/or more slowly, both of which make it easier to understand what is being said.

### **Hearing tip 4: Invest in your hearing health.**

All these tips work well, but if you suspect you have hearing loss, now is a good time to address it. These are challenging times and you should not have to deal with the additional complication of hearing loss. Book a hearing assessment and consider purchasing hearing aids.

Not only can hearing aids help you hear better, they can help you stay socially connected as you practice social distancing.

In addition, today's hearing aids can pair wirelessly to your phone or tablet, allowing you to have clearer, more enjoyable video calls.

**HearingLife** provides free, no obligation hearing assessments at over 300 network clinics nationwide. Book an appointment today by calling **1-855-565-7826** or visiting [hearinglife.ca/test](https://hearinglife.ca/test).



**HearingLife 1-855-565-7826 or [hearinglife.ca](https://hearinglife.ca)**

## Stay connected on social media



Did you know the Foundation has its own Facebook group and Twitter account? We regularly post information, news and resources about seniors' issues with a special focus on highlighting social isolation. During these times, it's more important than ever that we stay connected to one another even if it is through a simple action such as liking a friend's post or sharing a comment.

We welcome our group members to engage in conversation about topics important to them and we encourage you to join the conversation if you haven't already done so. We currently have 344 active Facebook group members and 290 followers on Twitter. We look forward to connecting with you online!

Join our End Social Isolation group on Facebook and follow us on Twitter @RTO\_Foundation.



## Foundation Comedy Corner



## Facebook Humour

For all of us older adults who have recently started using Facebook; I have been testing out whether or not I can make friends in the real world with the same techniques we use on Facebook. Therefore, every day I walk down the street and tell passers-by what I have eaten, how I feel at the moment, what I did the night before, what I will do later and with whom. I give them pictures of my family, my dog and of me gardening, taking things apart, watering the lawn, standing in front of landmarks, and driving around town, having lunch. I also listen in on their conversations, give them "thumbs up" and tell them I "like" them. And so far it's been working great; I already have four people following me: two police officers, a private investigator and a psychiatrist.

**Contact Us!**  
We'd love to  
hear from you.



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