

# THE 50+ Connection

NEWS and EVENTS from the  
Howard County Office on Aging and Independence

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## 50+ Centers Deliver Vital Connections Virtually

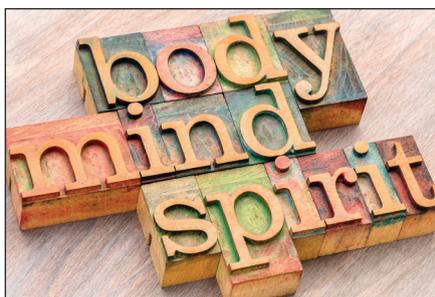
While senior centers across the nation may be physically closed due to the current global health pandemic, the importance of National Senior Center Month in September will be celebrated as usual. The 2020 theme is, appropriately, **Senior Centers: Delivering Vital Connections!**

According to the National Institute of Senior Centers (ncoa.org), this year's theme was chosen to highlight how senior centers continue to deliver vital connections to support older adults' desire to age well. Preventing social isolation is vital and a core senior center mission. While the delivery methods have changed during the pandemic, centers have succeeded in continuing to provide knowledge, programming and resources. Howard County's Office on Aging and Independence (OAI) has opened its virtual doors to extend its capacity to meet the needs and interests of a growing and diverse older adult community living in these uncertain times.

### Necessity is the Mother of Invention — Plato, 300 BC

Under normal operating conditions, making significant programmatic changes would have taken months or years of planning to accomplish. However, with the sudden closure of our 50+ Centers and all in-person activities put on hold, our **Virtual 50+ Center** was envisioned and brought to fruition in just a matter of weeks!

These efforts and innovative ideas were put together by the OAI team, which met and exceeded the challenge to devise a new — yet comprehensive — approach in its commitment to our older adult population. Our committed staff worked tirelessly to develop virtual programming which has since been incorporated into a virtual 50+ Center with over 200 programs to satisfy a broad spectrum of interests.



The **Virtual Offerings Guide** features an ever-growing variety of programs focused on mind, body and spirit to engage older adults, plus community and safety options to combat social isolation. Some of the highlights are:

**MIND** — OAI's SeniorsTogether program facilitators are continuing to host many of the program's peer support sessions and interactive discussions virtually via Webex, including Think Positive, Men's Roundtable, and News Talk, and Low Vision and Caregiver Support via conference call.

**BODY** — OAI's popular and energizing group exercise fitness pass has gone totally virtual! Eighteen different weekly classes ranging from Yoga and Pilates to Strength Training and Zumba, and can be accessed online for a modest monthly fee. Just recently, OAI was fortunate to bring KASA (Korean American Senior Association) onboard to offer Korean Line Dancing. Living Well evidence-based workshops have been added to the virtual lineup to help older adults learn how to better manage their chronic conditions, and nutrition education provides guidance and resources for those who want to make healthier decisions about their diet and eating habits.

A Message from  
Howard County Executive

### Calvin Ball



This month is National Senior Center Month, and although our senior centers are currently not open to the public, we are still committed to providing vital connections. While the delivery methods have changed during the pandemic, centers have succeeded in continuing to provide knowledge, programming and resources.

Our Office on Aging and Independence has created an innovative Virtual 50+ Center model that offers high-quality programming to engage you and your friends. The virtual offerings include fitness and cooking classes, social engagement and opportunities for lifelong learning. If you haven't checked out the virtual offerings yet, there is no time like the present! Learn more about our Virtual 50+ Centers online at [www.howardcountymd.gov/aging](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/aging).

Additionally, September is National Emergency Preparedness Month and we are getting the message out that "Disasters Don't Wait. Make your Plan Today!" After more than six months of responding to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, it's clear that being prepared for disasters is paramount. Beyond our current public health challenges, we still must prepare for weather emergencies that usually occur in the fall and winter.

There are many resources available for you and your family to make a plan, build an emergency kit, and be prepared for natural emergencies. For more information about how to prepare your emergency plan, visit [www.readyhoco.gov](http://www.readyhoco.gov).

While we continue to face the uncertainty of a pandemic, we can take comfort in the resilience and innovation of these critical services that continue to find a way to support everyone who calls Howard County home. Wishing you a safe and healthy month ahead.

**SPIRIT** — OAI staff and volunteers continue to make wellness calls to reach out to those with limited access to technology. Several centers have a weekly Coffee and Chat, and the Social Day programs host a Connections Corner program for individuals with cognitive impairments who need more support. There are plenty of opportunities for friendly contact, fun and laughter, including virtual games and trivia on Thursday evenings.

**COMMUNITY AND SAFETY** — Sit, Stitch & Give brings talented textile artists together to create items that benefit charities throughout our community. Other online presenters share information about Medicare, online safety tips, scams and fraud prevention to empower older adults to make better-informed decisions as they navigate an ever-changing world.

Feedback from participants thus far has been heartwarming and overwhelmingly positive, and lets staff know that their efforts to keep people informed and connected to their communities, while providing opportunities for wellness and continued growth, are on the right track.

To find a program that interests you, view the Virtual Offerings Guide at [www.howardcountymd.gov/aging](http://www.howardcountymd.gov/aging). Register by phone, Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at 410-313-1400 or 410-313-5440 (voice/relay).

# COVID-19 and Food Safety

By: Carmen Roberts, MS, RD, LDN, Nutritionist, Howard County Office on Aging and Independence

The safety of our food supply is a concern for all Americans. During the current pandemic, we are looking for ways to minimize our risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus. Contrary to some beliefs, the risk of getting COVID-19 from food and food packaging is very low. This is because the virus is spread mostly from person-to-person through respiratory droplets (such as from a sneeze or a cough).

The virus that causes COVID-19 cannot grow on food. Viruses require a living host (like a person or an animal) to multiply. Currently, no cases of COVID-19 have been identified where infection occurred by touching food, packaging, or shopping bags. There are ways, however, to help minimize your exposure to unhealthy bacteria and germs through proper food safety precautions:

**Start With Clean Hands** — After grocery shopping, handling a food package, or before preparing or eating food, wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

**Handle Packaged Food Safely** — When unpacking groceries, refrigerate meat, poultry, eggs, seafood, and dairy products within two hours of purchasing to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria (meat, poultry and some seafoods can also be put in the freezer, as long they have not previously been frozen). **Do not use disinfectants designed for hard surfaces (like bleach or ammonia) on food in cardboard or plastic wrap.**

**Clean Fresh Produce** — Gently rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under cold, running tap water. **Do not use soap or chemicals to clean produce.** Scrub produce with a clean brush before slicing, even if you don't plan to eat the peel.



◀◀ **As we age, our body's immune system and its ability to fight infection is weakened. Following these basic food safety tips can help you avoid getting sick from bacteria found in our food and minimize your exposure to viruses.**

## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

**MAKE A PLAN**

**BUILD A KIT**

**BE INFORMED**

A well-stocked **EMERGENCY PREP KIT** should include:

<b>FIRST AID KIT</b>	<b>MEDICATIONS</b>	<b>PERSONAL HYGIENE ITEMS</b>	<b>BABY SUPPLIES</b>	<b>PET SUPPLIES</b>
<b>SMALL TOOLS and FIRE EXTINGUISHER</b>	<b>EXTRA CASH</b>	<b>LIGHT, MATCHES and BATTERIES</b>		
<b>CELL PHONE and CHARGERS</b>	<b>PERSONAL DOCUMENTS</b>	<b>NON-PERISHABLES FOOD and WATER</b>	<b>SANITIZERS/ DETERGENTS</b>	<b>EMERGENCY BLANKET</b>

**Prepare yourself, your family and/or business.**  
**PLAN AHEAD FOR THE UNEXPECTED**

Understanding your hazard risk is the first step toward building a resilient community. Learn more about how you can protect your home or business from the consequences of a disaster at the following sites:

[readyhoco.org](http://readyhoco.org) — Howard County Government  
[weather.gov/safety](http://weather.gov/safety) — National Weather Service  
[ready.gov](http://ready.gov) — US Department of Homeland Security  
[emergency.cdc.gov](http://emergency.cdc.gov) — Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

— [www.readyhoco.org](http://www.readyhoco.org) —

## Complete **YOUR** Census Today!

The Census deadline is **SAT., SEPTEMBER 30**

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**YOUR RESPONSE is a CRITICAL piece!**

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[www.my2020census.gov](http://www.my2020census.gov)  
 410-313-6325 (VOICE/RELAY)

**#HoCoCounts**  
**2020CENSUS**

Howard County Office on **Aging and Independence**  
 Department of Community Resources and Services

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