



Southern Community Cohort Study

annual publication for study participants

Welcome to the 2020 SCCS Annual Newsletter. This has been a year of many changes in our lives and in our communities. We hope you and your family are doing well in these challenging times.

There are many ways we can each help to stop the spread of COVID-19. Find out ways to protect yourself and your family on page 2. Post this picture on your refrigerator or another spot in your home as a daily reminder.

This summer, we began asking some of you about your lives during the pandemic. One thing we have learned from the new survey thus far is that many of us are feeling the stress due to concerns about COVID-19, unemployment, and social isolation. On page 3, we share some healthy things we can all do now to feel our best during social isolation. These are also good habits to develop for the rest of our lives.

Did you notice a change to the look at the top of this newsletter? Learn the history of the beautiful and inclusive artwork created for SCCS nearly 20 years ago.

Finally, thank you again for being a part of the SCCS. Your participation in the research is helping to advance knowledge of the causes of cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and other diseases. Please continue to let us know if you move or change your phone number by visiting our website at www.southerncommunitystudy.org or calling us toll free at 1-800-734-5057.

Your Study Team Leaders,

William Blot, PhD, Wei Zheng, MD, PhD, Martha Shrubsole, PhD

How Has the COVID-19 Pandemic Affected You?

We tested a new survey this summer with a small group of SCCS participants to learn about your experiences during the COVID-19 outbreak. The test is now finished and we are inviting all SCCS participants to answer an online survey. Information about how you can participate is below.

Based on initial results from 101 SCCS participants, it appears that the pandemic has caused changes for many of us. 36% of SCCS participants reported that they or someone in their household lost their job or had their work hours reduced as a result of the pandemic. Since the beginning of the pandemic, 23% in the pilot study reported that they increased their physical activity compared to before the pandemic and 23% decreased their activity. Likewise, 47% began eating more fruit and vegetables. At the same time, access to food has become more difficult for 17%.

As you can see, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected SCCS participants in many different ways. We appreciate your faithful participation in the SCCS over the past 20 years. Learning more about your health and experiences during this time will be critical for understanding how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting you and your community.

HOW TO BE A PART OF THE NEW SCCS SURVEY:

1. Go to ors.southerncommunitystudy.org/survey on your computer or smartphone or text "COVID" to (301) 279-4273.
2. On the webpage, enter your personal survey code found near your address on the last page of this newsletter.

At this time, the survey is only available online. You will receive \$10 for completing the survey. If you have already completed the survey, your payment will arrive soon. Each survey that is completed provides extremely valuable information to be used in this research. Thank you.



McBride's Painting Symbolizes SCCS

In 2001, the SCCS research team wanted to develop artwork that could be used on all recruitment materials and the annual newsletter that would also represent the diverse people of the southeastern United States. Margaret Hargreaves, PhD, SCCS Principal Investigator at Meharry Medical College at the time, worked with Michael McBride, a Nashville artist, to create a painting to represent the ground-breaking cohort study that was being formed. In addition to teaching art at Tennessee State University, Mr. McBride paints in his studio in Nashville. He remembers choosing ethnic features and different skin colors to represent the diversity of the cohort.

www.fineartamerica.com/profiles/1-michael-mcbride

We will not contact you about any individual test results found from conducting our laboratory research as part of this study. Please remember to get your yearly check-up and recommended health screenings.

Protect yourself and your family!

SOCIAL DISTANCE

Keep a distance of 6 feet or more both at work and in public.



DON'T TOUCH

Avoid touching your face.



NO HANDSHAKES

Do not shake hands. Say hello or introduce yourself with a wave or head nod.

WASH

Use hand sanitizer or wash your hands many times every day.



LIMIT SHARING SUPPLIES

Limit sharing supplies (phones, laptops, pens, etc.).

CLEAN

Clean work surfaces at least once a day with a disinfectant.



COVER

Cough or sneeze into your sleeve, elbow, or a tissue. Throw the tissue in the trash.



CORRECT

WEAR A MASK

Wear a mask (cloth or fabric) when in situations where social distancing (greater than 6 feet apart) cannot be maintained.

Be sure to wear the mask correctly.

INCORRECT



CHECK SYMPTOMS

Monitor yourself and your family for symptoms.

If symptoms develop, isolate yourself right away and get tested.



How to Practice Self-Care in Times of Uncertainty

by Anne O'Halloran, LCSW, for My Southern Health

The coronavirus pandemic has drastically changed our way of living. With this change, it is natural to experience a variety of emotions – both comforting and difficult emotions. The good news is that we are in this together. The pandemic will stabilize, and routines will return to normal. Until then, there are ways to cope with the uncertainty and perhaps even develop new healthy routines that you will want to continue after the pandemic is over.

1. BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Our brains are designed to go into high alert when we are in unfamiliar situations (“fight or flight”). This state of high alert combined with anxiety and fear can lead to making quick decisions. Recognize that these difficult feelings are normal. Be kind to yourself and have compassion for each other. Know that we are all doing our best to navigate this pandemic.

2. FOCUS ON THE HERE AND NOW

One part of practicing self-care is being more aware of your surroundings. It is natural to get lost in the uncertainty and allow your mind to continually fear the “what ifs.” If you begin to experience this, simply take note and gently refocus your attention to the here and now. Ask yourself these questions:

- What do you hear/see/smell?
- What are you doing at this moment?
- Are you in immediate danger at this moment?

Once you refocus your attention, you may find yourself able to engage in a relaxation exercise such as muscle relaxation or a mindfulness activity.

3. SAVOR THE MOMENT

Be intentional about finding joy in your day. Schedule self-care activities that you enjoy, learn a new hobby, or accomplish something on last year's to-do list. Write down things that you are grateful for to give you a way to think about your day with an emphasis on what went well and what you enjoyed.

4. LIMIT EXPOSURE TO NEWS

High focus on news stories can lead to increased feelings of anxiety. Consider giving yourself a time limit on watching or reading the news. Official guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; www.cdc.gov) and local health departments can keep you updated on the latest best practices for staying healthy.

5. MAINTAIN A SELF-CARE ROUTINE AND STRUCTURE

Almost all our routines have been impacted by the pandemic. Sometimes these changes can affect our sense of self and safety. Consider the following activities when making a self-care routine for you and your family:

Bedtime and Wake Up Time: Our sleep patterns play an important role in our health and mood. Sticking with your normal bed and wake times helps your body and mind to restore themselves.



Exercise/Active Time: Being active is an excellent way to improve your mood and health. Making time to walk inside or outside of your home can be refreshing and relaxing.

Mealtime: Mealtime is a time to nourish yourself and connect with others. If you are separated from loved ones, video or phone chat dinners can help you to feel connected.

Playtime: Children explore and resolve complex feelings through play. As adults, we also need an activity we enjoy such as a jigsaw puzzle, adult coloring activities, or reading a book.

Social Time: Social distancing has changed the way we interact. It's time to be creative about how we maintain connections. Did you enjoy attending concerts before COVID-19? Watch concerts over the Internet or on TV. Use a telephone or a web-based technology to keep in touch with friends and family.

Medical Care: Keeping your healthcare appointments is important for your well-being even in a pandemic. Make time to get your influenza vaccine (“flu shot”). Seek treatment for anxiety, depression and/or trauma that may be new or worsening during the pandemic.

It's important the Southern Community Cohort Study has your most current contact information.

Please help us stay in touch with you! If your email, address or telephone number have changed, call us toll free at **1-800-734-5057** or visit our website at **www.southerncommunitystudy.org**

Add More Fruit to Your Day

There are many delicious and simple ways to meet the USDA recommendation to eat five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables per day.

Try adding berries, melon, cucumber slices, or mint leaves to your drinking water. Chill your infused water with ice and enjoy!

Make popsicles by mixing sliced fruits with 100% juice or your own infused water and freeze for 4-6 hours. You can also blend in plain yogurt for a creamier popsicle.



Medicaid Expansion Slowed Physical and Mental Decline

As part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, states could choose to expand Medicaid to allow more people to qualify to receive Medicaid benefits. SCCS research published recently by a team from Vanderbilt University and Harvard University compared the health of SCCS participants who live in States that did expand Medicaid to the health of SCCS participants in states that did not expand. They found that SCCS participants in states that expanded Medicaid in 2014 experienced lower rates of physical and mental health declines than SCCS participants in nearby regions that didn't expand health benefits for poor Americans. Study leader Dr John Graves says, "What we are finding is that Medicaid doesn't necessarily move people to better health, really what it does is keep people in their current state of health - stemming off health declines."

This work is important to understand healthy aging and the role of health care insurance for all Americans and was possible because of your faithful participation in SCCS.

Graves JA, Hatfield LA, Blot W, Keating NL, McWilliams M. Medicaid expansion slowed rates of health decline for low-income adults in southern states. *Health Aff (Millwood)*. . 2020 Jan;39(1):67-76. doi: 10.1377/hlthaff.2019.00929.

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Vanderbilt University Medical Center
1300 Riverplace Blvd., Suite #601
Jacksonville, FL 32207

