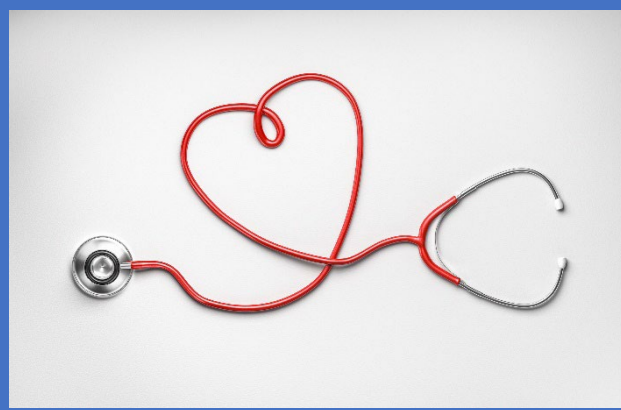




# Frontline Healthcare Worker Perceptions of Self-Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## INTRODUCTION

Personal health literacy was important during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, little is known about how the healthcare workers who took care of so many practiced personal self-care. WHO (2022, para.1) defines self-care as “the ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider.” According to the CDC (2023), “Personal health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.” To understand frontline healthcare workers’ perceptions of self-care during the COVID-19 pandemic, an online qualitative study was conducted during the post-peak months of the pandemic. Data was coded and then viewed through the lens of personal literacy.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this retrospective study was to explore self-care among frontline healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## METHODS

A qualitative study using the *Self-care During COVID-19 Questionnaire* was conducted online via Qualtrics between September 2022 and January 2023. The questionnaire consisted of 21 open-ended and demographic questions including the following, which is the focus of this poster:

“How have you taken care of yourself during the COVID-19 pandemic?”

Data from 118 respondents were exported from Qualtrics into Excel for analysis including preparing data, in vivo coding, developing categories and viewing responses through the lens of the following personal literacy categories:

1. Find and understand
2. Use information and services
3. Health-related decisions and actions for self and others
4. No personal literacy mentioned

## FINDINGS

**Gender**  
F (56) M (52), Non-Binary/Third Gender/Other (1), No answer (5)

**Age**  
18-24 (9), 25-39 (42), 40-50 (31), 51-60 (22), 61+ (10)

**Race**  
White (86), White, Other (2), Black or African American (6), Hispanic or Latino (10), Am Indian or AK Native (1), Am Indian or AK Native, White (2), Asian (5), Asian, White (1), Other (4) No answer (7)

### Personal Health Literacy Categories

| Personal Literacy Category                               | Responses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Find and understand                                      | Research/stayed informed (2)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Use info and services                                    | Masks/PPE (17)<br>Social distancing (9)<br>Vaccines (6)<br>Following mandates/guidelines (5)<br>Healthcare visits (4)<br>Isolation (2)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Health-related decisions and actions for self and others | Physical activity (26)<br>Nutrition (26)<br>Mental health (17)<br>Spending time with family and friends (14)<br>Rest/sleep (13)<br>Time away from work (12)<br>Taking time for oneself (7)<br>Maintain routine (5)<br>Time outdoors/nature (5)<br>Reading (4)<br>Hobbies (4)<br>Setting boundaries (3)<br>Spending time with pets (3)<br>Listening to music (3)<br>Avoiding social media/news (3)<br>Changed careers (2)<br>Completing grad. degree (2)<br>Religion/spirituality (2)<br>Massage/spa (2) |
| Issues with personal health literacy                     | No self-care (14 responses)<br>Difficulty with self-care (8)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

### Find and understand example



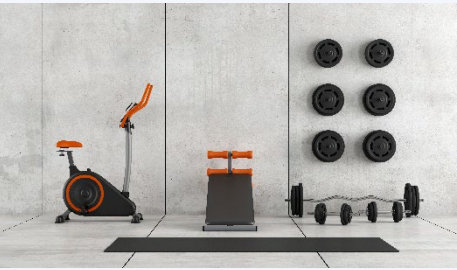
“Covid 19 was difficult, so little known, so much incorrect information, mandates for vaccinations. In that light I read, researched information, accepted things for what they were so as to avoid as much stress as possible...”

### Use information and services example

“Taking appropriate safety measures to limit exposure ie wearing a mask or limiting time out in the public. making sure if I knew I was exposed I would monitor and make sure no one else got sick from me. If I was feeling ill I took precautions to make sure I had adequate rest.”

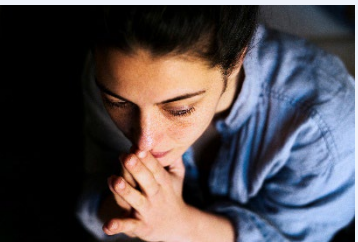
### Health-related decisions and actions for self and others

“I have focused on spending more time to ensure physical activity, healthy eating and mindfulness.”



“I feel like I actually took better care of myself during the pandemic because I didn’t have in-person school and more time to devote to myself like going on walks and meal prepping healthier meals. I also had more time to relax and time to myself.”

### Issues with Personal Health Literacy



“I’ve been good with nutrition but my work hours interfered with physical activity, rest, relaxation, and medical/dental care.”

“I did not really have the time to take care of myself during the pandemic. I was an essential worker, we were short staffed so instead of working less, I worked more. The overtime money was great but the lack of time I had for myself was non existent.”

## DISCUSSION

As the post-peak era of the COVID-19 pandemic continues and the potential for future public health emergencies exists, the findings from this study provide an important baseline understanding of healthcare workers’ perceptions of self-care during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, this study provides preliminary insight about personal health literacy among healthcare workers during emergency situations. The most frequently mentioned comments were about health-related decisions and actions for self and others and the use of information and services. The top ways participants took care of themselves regarding health decisions and actions were physical activity, nutrition, mental health, spending time with friends and family, rest/sleep, and time away from work. Regarding information and services, participants reported using masks/PPE, social distancing, vaccines, following mandates/guidelines, and healthcare visits. Regarding issues with personal health literacy, fourteen respondents reported practicing no self-care and eight participants reported difficulty with self-care.

The experiences of participants varied based on personal and professional situations. Healthcare practitioners are tasked with taking care of others everyday and during the pandemic expectations for healthcare workers were elevated. Exploring the self-care experiences of the people who were frontline during the pandemic highlights the question of how to take care of the people who take care of others. The reported benefits of self-care include improved well-being and lower morbidity, mortality, and healthcare costs. In order to keep our healthcare practitioners healthy, more research and attention to self-care and personal health literacy among healthcare professionals could play an important role in health promotion during times of emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic.

## REFERENCES

- CDC. (2023). What is health literacy? Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/learn/index.html>
- World Health Organization (2022). What do we mean by self-care? Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/self-care-interventions/definitions/en/>

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