

# *Voice of the Consumer*



## Romance Scams are on the Rise!

It was all going so well. You met online and fell madly in love, and if it weren't for the fact that your new beau lives in another country, you'd probably be married by now. Which is why your online love is asking for some cash—just enough to move to your town and finally meet you in person. At least that's what the person on the other end of the internet told you. It might be true, but there's also a good chance you've unwittingly been hooked by one of the most common romance scams.

Run by con artists who fake romantic interest so they can swindle you out of money or steal your identity, romance scams are just one of many online scams. The crimes typically take place on dating apps and social media (though they can happen in real life), and they often involve catfishing and love bombing. From military romance scams to pig butchering (more on that ominous act in a moment), romance scams have one thing in common: They capitalize on our human need for love.

Many people found themselves alone and looking for love during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and scammers capitalized on this. The FBI reports that romance scams are multiplying. In 2021, they cost more than 24,000 Americans about \$1 billion.

"There were widespread reports of loneliness, depression, substance abuse and alienation," says Monica Eaton, chief operating officer of fraud-management company Chargebacks911. "So it's no wonder that romance scams have been on the uptick: If you're desperate enough, you're likely to overlook an awful lot of red flags."

### What are romance scams?

When a con artist fakes romantic interest in someone, crafting a too-good-to-be-true persona to weasel their way into the victim's heart and steal their money, they're conducting a romance scam. And pretty much everyone is fair game for this long con.

According to a poll conducted by Social Catfish, a company that uses reverse-search technology to prevent online scams, 75% of romance scam victims are college educated. That's more proof that intelligence has nothing to do with whether you'll get scammed.

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Fraudsters prey on those who may be lonely, which is why romance scams disproportionately impact the elderly. Widows and widowers are particularly at risk after a loss.

"Once the intimate trust is established, the scammer fulfills their original plan to empty the victim's bank account and/or steal their identity."

There are plenty of twists on the crime, but Donna Andersen, founder of LoveFraud.com and author of Red Flags of Love Fraud, says there are two basic types: the online swindle and the real-life romance scam. Both aim to take your hard-earned cash and may involve bank scams or wire fraud.

## The online swindle

As the name suggests, these romance scams happen over the internet. "Perpetrators find someone online, seduce the target into falling in love with them and then convince the target to send money," explains Andersen. "Often the perpetrator and the target never meet in person."

Any legitimate dating site or social media platform holds potential for romance scammers, but scammers are big fans of Match.com, OKCupid, Plenty of Fish, Instagram, Facebook and Google Hangouts. And, of course, there's Tinder. You may be familiar with the case of a con man who used the dating app to fleece women out of money, made famous by the Netflix true-crime documentary. The Tinder Swindler.

Catfishing—or luring someone into a relationship by using a fake profile—is such a problem on dating sites that the Federal Trade Commission sued Match (which owns most of the major dating sites) for creating fake profiles and offering bogus guarantees to trick consumers into paid subscriptions.

## The real-life romance scam

The second type of romance scam takes place in real life. "The perpetrator and the target do physically meet, have what the target believes is a relationship and perhaps even marry and have children," explains Andersen.

But it's all fake. The scammer's agenda was always to live off the victim and take as much as possible. "Once the target's money and other resources are gone, the relationship is usually over," she says.

## What are common examples of romance scams?

Once you figure out how to spot a romance scammer, their schtick becomes cliché and obvious. There are some common traits of these con artists, and many recycle the same personas and narratives.

## The member of the military

Scammers impersonating a member of the U.S. military often claim that there is some reason the military can't provide needed funds—and thus the victim needs to help. They often claim to be deployed overseas and cannot meet in person, and they use stolen photos of military members to create fake profiles. They'll say they need money for a plane ticket and other expenses to travel back to the United States. Naturally, they tell their victim they can't wait to meet them and finally be together.

## The international worker

There are some major red flags that your long-distance lover is conning you: These romance scammers say they'll be home in a month or two and suggest getting to know each other online. They may claim to be from the United States, yet they use awkward syntax and don't seem to understand North American culture. "Their personal details change, and they can't keep their stories straight," Peel says. "And they behave in odd ways to give you proof of their story without you asking."

## The sugar mama or sugar daddy

Sugar mamas and sugar daddies prey on younger people, often students, nurses, teachers, single parents or others who might be in need of extra cash. The scammers tell the victim they'll pay them a weekly allowance just to talk to them—not for sex or nude photos—but then they say they need a portion of it back for an unexpected bill.



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"They send a check or money from a stolen credit card," Peel says. "And you send the money back and get caught when the check bounces or the credit card company reverses the charge."

Not only have victims lost the money they thought they were getting, but they've sent their own money to the scammer as well. "The worst part," Peel says, "is if you can't cover the payment you send, the bank can charge you with fraud. So not only does the scammer get your money, but you end up fighting a fraud charge where you could be thrown in jail."

## The widow or widower

This one usually starts with a sob story, like your would-be lover is a widow or widower, maybe with kids. Such highly emotional narratives serve an important purpose: The con artist wants to gain your trust, warns Rebecca Keller of Debt Bombshell.

These scammers are likely to prey on other widows or widowers, offering not only the illusion of romance but that of family, something the victim may be missing. (It's a good reason for adult children of aging widows and widowers to learn about elder financial fraud.)

## The crypto pusher

Experts call this one "pig butchering," and if that weren't unappetizing enough, just wait until you hear what these scammers plan to do to your bank account.

One of the latest romance scams to hit the dating market, pig butchering is also a type of crypto scam—hence the nickname CryptoRom.

In it, criminals (aka butchers) troll for potential victims (so-called pigs), who they proceed to swindle out of money. "Bad actors catfish unwary victims on social media, dating websites and apps like Tinder, Facebook Dating and WhatsApp," says Jason Glassberg, co-founder of Casaba Security. "Some victims have even lost their entire life savings." The scammer usually contacts the victim via WhatsApp or a dating site like Hinge. After building trust, the criminal then pressures the victim to buy cryptocurrency assets and deposit them into a legitimate-looking crypto-trading app that's controlled by the scammer.

## Signs of a romance scammer

You never meet the person  
Your new beau keeps making plans to see you but then doesn't show up. Usually, he claims something terrible has happened—his mother died, for instance—which might lead him to ask you for money.

## You don't even see the person

Your new girlfriend can't meet in person, but that's understandable. She lives in another country, after all. At least you can video chat, right? Well, not if you're being catfished. If you ask to Skype or FaceTime with your new love, she might stall, saying there's something wrong with her camera. And if you finally land a video call, it's probably so dark that you can't see what the person looks like.

## You feel like you met your soul mate

You seem to have the same interests, the same ideas and the same desires. It sounds great—but it's no coincidence. The perpetrator has studied you on social media, figured out what you want in a partner and fashioned him- or herself into precisely what you are looking for.

## You're in a whirlwind romance

The romance scammer showers you with attention and affection. He or she wants to be in contact with you all the time and quickly makes plans for the future. You think it's love, but it's really love bombing. The objective is to get you emotionally hooked before you can escape.

## Your new love values privacy

Because dating apps and sites threaten their nefarious mission, romantic scammers will suggest texting or emailing. They'll tell you how much they value their privacy, often because they're supposedly a high-profile person or public figure.

"The victim becomes more susceptible to scamming after giving up their phone numbers or primary email addresses," says Santini. (Never mind the fact that hackers can do plenty with just your email or phone number!)

## Directly or indirectly, your new love asks for money

If your boyfriend or girlfriend asks for any money at all, watch out. It doesn't matter if it's for an airplane ticket to see you, for medical care for their sick mother or for an investment opportunity. Asking for money is inappropriate in a romantic relationship, especially one that's brand new—and especially when you've never met the person face to face.



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## It's Time to Make Voting Easier



Since the results of the 2020 election and claims that the "election was stolen", many Americans are wondering... what next?

Many Americans approve of mail-in ballots for people who have extenuating circumstances that may prevent them from voting in-person. Other people enjoy taking advantage of mail-in ballots so they do not have to get in a car, leave the home, or wait in line. The novel coronavirus made this option practical for those who did not feel safe venturing out into public.

However, with the overall claims regarding mail-in ballots are unfair or cannot be properly accounted for, many people are wondering if there are easier ways to vote; especially for our senior citizens.

Here are ways to make voting easier this time around:

### Expand online voter registration:

Fourteen states allow citizens to register to vote online. Another five have passed legislation that will allow online registration before the 2024 elections. The Presidential Commission on Election Administration thinks every state should move to online registration. It's not a partisan issue, either: Conservative Utah and South Carolina and liberal Washington and Oregon all allow online registration. And it even helps boost turnout. The ability to register online increased registration rates among voters aged 18-24 from 29 percent to 53 percent in the years after Arizona adopted the practice.

### States should share voter

**rolls:** Cleaning up voter rolls to make sure no one is registered in two different states is a central aim of two groups of states that share voter lists. The Electronic Registration Information Center, a consortium of seven states, and the Interstate Voter Registration Crosscheck Program, a coalition of 28 states, both allow states to cross-check registrations. The commission wants to see more interstate cooperation.

### Plan resources to cut wait

**times:** No voter should have to wait more than 30 minutes to cast a ballot, the commission said: "Excessive wait times are avoidable if the jurisdiction has undergone proper planning and develops systems to inform the responsible authorities when a breakdown occurs."

**Expand early voting:** "Early voting is here to stay," the commission reports. In 27 states, a voter can get an absentee ballot without needing an excuse.

"States that have not already done so should expand alternative ways of voting, such as mail balloting and in-person early voting," the commission concludes. Online tracking of absentee ballots is one way to increase safeguards against fraud as the use of absentee ballots increases.

**Hold elections in schools:** Every community in the country has a public school. They're usually relatively new, have big spaces, are handicapped accessible, and perfect for making sure even people waiting in long lines can wait indoors. And here's something the kids will love: To ensure security, the commission wants Election Day to be scheduled as an in-service day — also known, to students at least, as a day off.

**Get with the 21st century:** Six years ago, a subcommittee within the Election Assistance Commission proposed new guidelines for voting machine technology. But the EAC doesn't have enough commissioners to sustain a quorum, meaning it can't adopt those new standards. The lack of standards means voting technology companies aren't bringing new products to market, which means voters are forced to use old machines that break, or are susceptible to hacking or fraud. What's more, concern about fraud is leading to tensions between election administrators who want to start using computer technology and the tech developers who are nervous about hackers. The commission wants the two sides to get together to work it out.

**Seriously. The 21st century:** The commission wants to see comprehensive audits of all voting machines after each election, with results disclosed to the public. And if the EAC doesn't work, states should form a consortium — as many have through shared voter lists — to establish their own technological and security standards. And new technology like iPads can help voters "pre-fill" ballots at home, as they contemplate their voter guides, to cut the time it takes them to fill out a ballot at the polling place.

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## Help voters before they show up:

The commission recommends using “line walkers,” who would patrol lines of waiting voters to make sure they have proper identification and that they’re in the right precincts, in order to help troubleshoot before a voter even gets to the front of the line. Some jurisdictions, like Orange County, Calif., and Travis County, Tex., publish wait times at certain polling places online, so voters know how much time to block out to go cast their ballots.

**Go electronic:** Dozens of jurisdictions around the country are using, or testing, electronic poll books. It’s a lot easier to use a search function to look up a voter’s information than to page through massive paper-based lists. They can even help security: Minnesota Secretary of State Mark Ritchie, whose office is experimenting with electronic poll books, told us some victims of domestic violence worry their abusers can surreptitiously look to see if the victim has voted. Using an electronic poll book can eliminate that threat.

**Go online:** Voters who live overseas, especially those in the military, are most susceptible to being disenfranchised thanks to slow international mail. The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act helped by extending the period between primary and general elections, to make sure ballots make it to voters, but online voting would bring down even more barriers. Dozens of states fall short of even offering online absentee ballot request links for UOCAVA voters. Creating ballots with individual barcodes that could be printed out overseas would help more military members vote.



**Recruit new poll workers:** Who has time to sit around for a whole day checking in workers? Retirees, who make up a significant portion of poll workers in the United States. But in some jurisdictions, there aren’t enough retirees to staff the polls. Recruiting college and high school students, as well as part-time workers and public-sector employees, can diversify the poll worker pool and make the system run more efficiently, the commission said (That works doubly well if those high school students get the day off from school, and if they get credit in class for time worked).



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## Wildfire devastation and consumer impact



The impact of wildfires can touch virtually every part of your life. With the devastating wildfires burning across Sicily, Maui, and other parts of the world, Mother Nature is wreaking havoc and changing lives—and taking them.

The impact of wildfires on business is far-reaching, too, but there are proactive steps companies can take.

### The Devastation of Wildfires

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the month of August averages over 8,000 wildfires—and over one and a half million acres of damage.

This year's wildfire season has already been especially devastating. Wildfires have destroyed over 1 million acres of land this year—putting millions of Americans under wildfire warnings and smoke advisories.

Fighting these fires consumes massive amounts of resources. For example, 2021's Dixie Fire in California ended up as the most destructive wildfire of the year, causing roughly \$637 million in damage. Wildfires cause widespread damage—destroying land, buildings, homes, transportation routes, wildlife, and agriculture. Even worse, they end up injuring and taking the lives of many people.

### The Importance of Early Detection

Because wildfires can spread so quickly (up to 15 miles-per-hour) and start so suddenly, early detection is of the utmost importance. Unlike hurricanes, which usually show up on forecasts days or even over a week before landfall, wildfires emerge without warning. If you find yourself in its path, time is of the essence.

A threat monitoring system is the most effective way to detect wildfires as quickly as possible. You can set up the system to warn you automatically—via SMS, email, or push notification—whenever a wildfire emerges that could impact your people or business (by forecasting the spread of the fire and cross-referencing your business and employees' locations). Some systems allow you to communicate directly with trained intelligence analysts to help determine what threats are likely to impact your people. Early detection allows you to get the word out immediately that at-risk employees should evacuate and the office will be closed until further notice.

### Wildfire Impacts on Businesses

Business owners feel helpless watching a wildfire encroach on their livelihood. They know what's at stake. As wildfires rage, there are both direct and indirect effects on organizations:

The Oak Fire, which has burned at least 16,800 acres near Yosemite national park, had a direct impact on numerous homes and businesses. Communication became essential to ensuring employee safety and sending out alternate work information.

### Direct impacts

*Property:* Businesses with buildings in the path of a wildfire will obviously be impacted. But even if a company doesn't own property, if it has a physical location, it will be disrupted when evacuating or modifying work hours due to wildfire.

*Equipment:* Any equipment located in the vicinity of a wildfire will be at risk. Your business will need to protect or evacuate this equipment.

*Assets:* Certain industries, such as agriculture, ranching, real estate, and forestry may have their key assets threatened by wildfires.

*People:* Even if an organization's physical location is not at risk, some of its employees (who usually live dispersed around a region) might be. If certain neighborhoods are threatened, damaged, or evacuated, a business could temporarily lose a good portion of its workforce.

A wildfire can also disrupt or even shut down a business. Even if the company recovers, its customer base may not. An organization can lose customers if the area is highly damaged or perceived to be damaged. If the business had to close for a period of time, customers may have found alternate companies to fill the void.

There are also far-reaching consequences to a wildfire. A supply chain already stressed by COVID-19 has become even more stressed by growing wildfire seasons and their bigger effects. With labor shortages across industries, the job market is further affected by wildfires.



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## Indirect impacts

**Labor market:** Wildfires inevitably impact the labor and job markets. When dealing with the aftermath of a wildfire, employees may skip work, take leaves of absence, or use sick days to tend to their families and neighbors. They may even move out of the area altogether to start fresh.

**Transportation:** Wildfires often make traveling in hard-hit areas difficult, shutting down roads and other transportation routes such as railways. Companies that rely on these roads for employee travel or transporting goods have to be patient while crews work to clear those areas from debris. Emergency and recovery vehicles may take over these routes for some time.

**Utilities:** Even if a wildfire doesn't threaten a power plant or sewage facility, it could pose a risk to the infrastructure supporting these utilities. Until crews can repair the damaged lines, many companies cannot operate, much less generate revenue to pay the bills.

**Smoke/air quality:** Wildfires can pose far-reaching risks due to the smoke that is produced from the fire. For example, wildfires in Canada have recently produced so much smoke that it blanketed much of the U.S. and caused air quality alerts and breathing risks to those thousands of miles away from the fire itself.

All of these factors often lead to an increase in a variety of prices that trickle down to the consumer, from labor and wood/production costs to transportation costs. These extra expenses can be difficult to absorb for most businesses. Without proper reserves, a single wildfire has the potential to wipe out even the most well-established company.

## Minimize the Impact of Wildfires on Your Business

Whether your business is in a wildfire-prone area or relies on vendors, suppliers, or customers who are, every wildfire should be perceived as a threat to business continuity and operations.

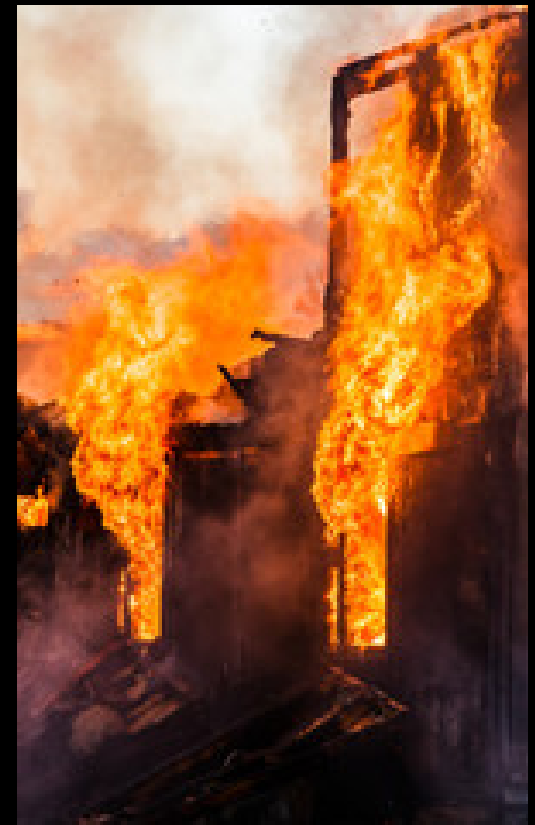
While there isn't much you can do to stop a wildfire from reaching your business, you can take precautions by assessing how a wildfire could impact your organization. The most important risk to minimize is the risk to employee safety. Having a centralized emergency communication solution at your fingertips is the best way to keep your employees safe and informed.

You also need a way to detect the threat early on. A threat monitoring system like AlertMedia's—which is integrated with emergency communication capabilities—is the best way to learn of the threat immediately and get the message out as soon as possible.

Communication during wildfire season is challenging if you don't have the right tools in place. Take steps to make your business as resilient as possible if a wildfire threatens you, your supply chain, your customers, or your employees.

The most important part of wildfires is to be as prepared as you can possibly be. Whether it be your residence, your neighborhood, town, place of business, or your own business. Take the proper precautionary steps and stay in constant communication with the people who can help you.

Stay safe out there.



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## Do We Need COVID Boosters Forever?



After the novel coronavirus came on scene back in 2019, the world as we know it changed. From the CDC recommending--and in some places and professions even requiring--COVID vaccines, boosters are now readily available for everyone. The new bivalent booster has been available for the last 6 months and has isolated several of the most prominent strains going across the country. But as more mutations come to the forefront, the booster may need to keep changing. So this begs the question: Do we need to take the COVID booster forever if this virus never goes away?

### Boosters may provide longer-lasting protection

Boosters are designed to do exactly that—to boost your body's initial response to a vaccine and provide more protection against a particular pathogen. And it's not that unusual for a vaccine aimed at preventing a viral illness to require boosters, Dr. Bernard Camins, medical director for infection prevention at the Mount Sinai Health System, told TODAY, pointing to the two-dose childhood measles, mumps and rubella vaccine. "In this situation, we're finding out that even with the COVID-19 vaccines, you do need boosters," he said.

Researchers are looking at two major factors that will determine whether or not we'll eventually need more boosters. First, does the protection provided by the vaccines wane over time? And second, are the current COVID-19 vaccines still relatively well matched to the version of the virus that's circulating right now?

If the protection dissipates over time, as appeared to be the case with the initial two-shot doses, then we might eventually need another round of boosters to amp up our immune responses.

### Future booster shots may be targeted to specific variants

If a coronavirus variant emerges that appears to significantly evade the protection we have from current vaccines, a new booster might be required to account for that. And future COVID-19 boosters may target specific coronavirus variants.

Preliminary data released last week suggests that three doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine produce a protective immune response against the omicron variant that's comparable to two doses of the Pfizer vaccine against previous variants. But also show that those who received only the primary two-dose series have a significant reduction in protective antibodies compared to those who also received a booster dose.

Those findings will need to be replicated with real-world data before experts can make any conclusions about the effectiveness of Pfizer's vaccine against omicron — or whether or not an entirely new COVID-19 vaccine is necessary.

Both Pfizer and Moderna already announced they're working on omicron-specific versions of their vaccines and expect them to be ready in March 2022, should they be needed. "If it's more targeted, you're probably going to see fewer breakthrough infections with that booster," Camins said.

For now, "all of the vaccines are the original variety," Kelen said. If omicron doesn't end up being any more dangerous or lethal than previous variants, we may not necessarily need a new vaccine.

### Will we need a COVID-19 vaccine every year?

For now, experts say it's too early to tell whether or not we'll need more boosters or for how long we should expect to receive them. Many experts anticipate that COVID-19 boosters will end up being like your yearly flu vaccine, Kelen said, adding that we may one day have an annual combined flu and COVID-19 vaccine. (In fact, Moderna is already working on it, Reuters reported.)

If you haven't gotten your initial series or third dose yet, experts say you shouldn't let the possibility of more boosters dissuade you from getting this one now. Not only does the booster significantly increase your protection from COVID-19 infection, but it also makes you less likely to transmit the virus to others.

It continues to be our duty to keep ourselves safe not only for our own protection, but for the protection of our loved ones. The faster everyone gets on board, the more chance we have of eradicating COVID from mutating and taking more lives.



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## Colon Cancer Warning Signs to Look Out For

Colon cancer can be devastating and affect virtually anybody. It is imperative to properly screen to ensure you stay safe from this type of cancer.

Colon cancer is a type of cancer that begins in the cells lining the large intestine (colon); some researchers include the rectum and prefer the term colorectal cancer. There are over 101,000 new cases of colon cancer every year in the U.S. Colon cancer is the third-leading cause of cancer death in the U.S. for both men and women.

4 main stages of colon cancer exist, referred to as stages 1-4. Stage 4 colon cancer is metastatic colon cancer that has spread away to other parts of the body such as the liver, bones, or lungs.

Other conditions that can cause the same signs and symptoms as colon cancer include bleeding in the stool, ulcerative colitis (UC), and Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

### What are the early warning signs of colon cancer?

Unlike some diseases, colon cancer typically does not produce symptoms or signs in its early stages. This is why following screening recommendations is critical. The earlier a colon cancer is detected, the greater the likelihood of successful treatment.

Colon cancer may begin to produce symptoms and signs as it grows and expands. However, there is no specific sign or symptom that definitely indicates colon cancer is present.

When signs and symptoms do occur, the following are some of the most typical:

1. Persistent change in bowel habits
2. Narrow or pencil-thin stools
3. Diarrhea or constipation
4. Blood in the stool, rectal bleeding (blood may appear as bright red blood or dark stools)
5. Persistent abdominal pain or discomfort, such as cramps or bloating
6. Feeling that your bowel doesn't empty completely
7. Unexplained weight loss
8. Fatigue, tiredness, or weakness

### What are the stages of colon cancer?

Each stage of colon cancer refers to the extent of spread of the cancer at the time that it is identified. There are 4 main stages of colon cancer, referred to as stages 1-4:

- Stage 1 colon cancer has spread from the lining of the large intestine into the muscular wall of the large intestine.
- Stage 2 colon cancer has spread through the wall of the intestine to the outermost layer and may grow into adjacent organs.
- Stage 3 colon cancer has spread to lymph nodes in the area or to other organs in the area.
- Stage 4 colon cancer is metastatic colon cancer. It has spread away from the colon to other parts of the body such as the liver, bones, or lungs.

### What other conditions have the same signs and symptoms as colon cancer?

There are other conditions that can cause the same signs and symptoms as colon cancer. Some of these conditions are very common.

- Bleeding in the stool can be caused by inflammatory bowel diseases such as Crohn's disease.
- Ulcerative colitis (UC) as well as ulcers and diverticulitis.
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) may cause changes in bowel habits including diarrhea and constipation along with bloating and abdominal discomfort.

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, it is important to discuss them with your doctor to help determine the cause of your symptoms.

You can save your life by early detection and paying attention to your body. It is vital to your health and wellness to stay on top of your physical and mental well-being.



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## The Healthiest Way to Live Longer



And it's fun, too! Researchers have discovered the healthiest way--and an enjoyable one at that--to live a longer, healthier, better life.

By now, we've all heard of the health (and wallet) benefits of a Mediterranean-style diet — healthy fats, whole grains, fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, and seeds with limited amounts of red meat and dairy. But adopting the Mediterranean lifestyle might be the true ticket to a longer, healthier life, a new study has found.

The study, published in Mayo Clinic Proceedings, found that people who adhered to a Mediterranean lifestyle were less likely to die from any cause, and less likely to die from cancer specifically. This type of lifestyle has also been associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease.

But what is a Mediterranean lifestyle? Well, it's not just a diet. There are other characteristics that define a Mediterranean lifestyle, and unfortunately for all you homebodies out there, one of them is being social.

In addition to a diet focused on fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and low in added sugars and salts, healthy habits such as physical activity, adequate sleep, and healthy socialization are all characteristics of the lifestyle.

What makes the new study unique is that the participants weren't from the area considered Mediterranean— Southern Italy, Greece, and Crete. They were from the U.K.

Researchers from La Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health examined data collected from 110,779 people and added to the U.K. Biobank. The team analyzed data according to the Mediterranean Lifestyle (MEDLIFE) index, which, according to a press release, catalogs factors such as:

- "‘Mediterranean food consumption’ (intake of foods part of the Mediterranean diet such as fruits and whole grains);
- 'Mediterranean dietary habits' (adherence to habits and practices around meals, including limiting salt and drinking healthy beverages); and
- 'physical activity, rest, and social habits and conviviality' (adherence to lifestyle habits including taking regular naps, exercising, and spending time with friends)."

Nine years after the initial analysis, 4,247 participants had died--731 from cardiovascular disease, 2,401 from cancer, and 1,115 from other causes. The researchers determined that participants with higher MEDLIFE scores were 29% less likely to die from any cause during the nine-year study period, and 28% less likely to die from cancer. Participants who scored highest in the "physical activity, rest, and social habits and conviviality" section were also less likely to die from cardiovascular disease.

"This study suggests that it's possible for non-Mediterranean populations to adopt the Mediterranean diet using locally available products and to adopt the overall Mediterranean lifestyle within their own cultural contexts," study author Mercedes Sotos Prieto, Ramon y Cajal research fellow at La Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and adjunct assistant professor of at Harvard Chan School, said in a statement. "We're seeing the transferability of the lifestyle and its positive effects on health."

Other studies have shown the positive effects of healthy social interaction on long-term health and well-being. The U.S. Surgeon General recently announced that the U.S. is suffering through an "epidemic of loneliness" that contributes to increased rates of chronic diseases like cardiovascular disease, stroke, and cognitive disorders such as dementia, and has a similar effect on lifespan as smoking 15 cigarettes per day. And a Veterans Affairs study found that being social can lengthen your life. Small social interactions and short bursts of exercise throughout the day can make a big difference in mortality and quality of life as we age. So go for a walk, chat with a neighbor, and take a nap. You deserve it.

So get out there, eat well, drink plenty, socialize with your loved ones, and stay active. Your body and mind will thank you for it!

