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## PREVENTIVE HEALTH

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### THE BACK TO ROUTINE ISSUE

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BACK TO SCHOOL? 5 WAYS TO SUPPORT  
KIDS' MENTAL HEALTH

MASK WEARING 101

WORKPLACE SUICIDE PREVENTION

CONSIDERING A DETOX? IT MAY AFFECT  
MORE THAN YOUR BODY

5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT NURSE  
PRACTITIONERS

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# BACK TO SCHOOL? 5 WAYS TO SUPPORT KIDS' MENTAL HEALTH

By Copeman Healthcare and Dylan Zambrano, RSW, Akira by TELUS Health

Most of us can remember that “back to school” feeling. For some children, it’s a time full of excitement about seeing friends after the summer vacation, but for others, it can cause feelings of stress as they leave the comfort of their family and home. If your child is returning to school this September, their anxiety may be particularly heightened as they face new realities in a COVID-19 world.

Here are five tips to support your kids’ mental health – and your own – this fall:

## 1. Practice open and honest communication

Speak openly with your children about what they are anxious about and reassure them that their feelings of anxiety and stress are normal. It’s important to be honest about some of the changes they may experience at school this year.<sup>1</sup> Children may be expected to wear face masks and to physically distance themselves from friends. Reassure your children that the safety measures schools put in place are intended to keep teachers, students and families healthy.

It can also be helpful to remind them of the positives that returning to school brings. Children will be able to see their friends and teachers in a place that they haven’t been able to enjoy in months. As a parent or caregiver, you can feel good about your children having more structured days that include classroom time, lunchtime at school, homework and family time – a routine that may help restore a sense of normalcy during these times of uncertainty.<sup>2</sup>

Foster openness by encouraging an open dialogue with your child – ask them about their day when their classes are done, and watch for hesitancy or stress when they describe their experiences.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Watch for signs of mental distress

When children are anxious, it’s important to acknowledge and validate their anxiety.<sup>4</sup> Create space for your children to open up about their feelings about returning to school and keep an eye out for signs of stress. Signs of mental distress in children may include:<sup>5</sup>

- Difficulty concentrating
- Poor sleep or eating patterns
- Irritability
- Worry or negative thoughts
- Restlessness
- Crying
- Complaints of nausea or stomach aches

For children and adults alike, it is normal for emotions to change from day to day, especially during transition periods. Pay attention to the frequency of the stress behaviours your child is showing. Consistent stress behaviours may signify a greater issue,<sup>6</sup> so be sure to speak with your primary care provider or start a consult on ***Akira by TELUS Health*** if you are concerned about how your child is coping.

Creative activities such as playing and drawing can also help children to express themselves and communicate any negative feelings they may be having.<sup>7</sup>

## 3. Keep your child informed and prepared

Keep children informed of the changes they can expect, so you can work to normalize this unusual return to school period. Stay up to date with school policies and let your children know about changes to classroom size, desk space, lunch or recess activities and extracurricular activities. It may also be helpful to mention the possibility of future school closures, so your child is not jarred if their school closes down later in the year.

Remember that most studies conclude that while children may carry the novel coronavirus, they are less at risk than others of experiencing severe symptoms.<sup>8</sup> Discussing this can be helpful in reassuring children who are nervous about contracting COVID-19. It can also be helpful to emphasize to your child that it is important to follow the school’s safety measures, as they help protect more vulnerable members of our community, such as their grandparents.

## 4. Look after your own mental health

Children take emotional cues from the adults in their lives, namely their parents or caregivers, so it’s important to prioritize your mental health. Parenting during COVID-19 is a stressful and anxiety-inducing experience. Ensure that you are taking care of your own wellbeing and this will translate to the mental wellbeing of your child through positive parent-child interactions.<sup>9</sup>

By modelling calmness and confidence, you will help influence your children’s emotional state.

## 5. Be mindful of bullying and stigmatization

We’ve seen incidents of stigmatization and racism when it comes to COVID-19 in our country. Unfortunately, these stigmas can be passed on to children. Explaining to your child that the virus has nothing to do with a person’s appearance, what language they speak, or where they are from, reinforces the importance of treating all people equally: with kindness and respect.

Remind your children to tell an adult if they experience or see someone else experience bullying at school or online.

<sup>1</sup> Unicef: Supporting your child’s mental health as they return to school during COVID-19.

<sup>2</sup> Montreal Children’s Hospital: How to support children’s mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>3</sup> Unicef: Supporting your child’s mental health as they return to school during COVID-19

<sup>4</sup> National Association of School Psychologists: Helping children cope with changes resulting from COVID-19

<sup>5</sup> Anxiety Canada: Anxiety in Children.

<sup>6</sup> Anxiety.org: Identifying signs of anxiety in children

<sup>7</sup> Unicef: Supporting your child’s mental health as they return to school during COVID-19

<sup>8</sup> Canadian Pediatric Services: Update on COVID-19 epidemiology and impact on medical care in children: April 2020

<sup>9</sup> Anxiety Canada: Talking to kids about COVID-19

**MASK  
WEARING**

**101**



Wearing a mask has become a part of daily life for Canadian adults and kids alike, but there's a lot of room for error when it comes to wearing, storing and washing them properly.

Here's what you need to know to make sure you and your loved ones are protected and protecting others optimally:

**1) There's only one correct way to wear a mask.** Your mask must cover your mouth and nose. Don't pull your mask down and keep it under your chin when moving between indoor and outdoor spaces. "That is probably the worst thing you could do with the mask," Dr. Zain Chagla, a professor and infectious disease specialist at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario told CBC News. When you wear your mask around your chin, droplets or germs on the outside of the mask can spread to your chin and lower lip and easily enter your body.

**2) Hold the mask by its ear loops.** Touching the mask portion may contaminate your hands, so handling the mask by its ear loops is the safest way to put it on and take it off. Always wash or sanitize your hands before and after handling your mask.

**3) Store your face mask in a paper bag or envelope.** Your mask must be properly removed and stored when you're not wearing it. The best place to store it throughout the day when you are not using it is in a paper bag or envelope. Plastic bags should not be used as they can retain moisture and may promote bacteria growth. In low risk places, it's OK to keep your mask in your pocket when not in use, but paper storage is ideal.

**4) Clean and reuse your mask properly.** The best mask for non-medical use is a re-usable and machine washable cloth mask that gets replaced daily, or twice daily if you or your child will be wearing it for most of the day (in those cases, you would ideally switch to a clean mask at lunch time). Cloth masks may also be hand washed with room temperature water and bleach, soaked for five minutes and rinsed thoroughly – just make sure the mask is completely dry before using it again. Cloth masks are widely available at online retailers and dollar stores, or you can try making simple ones at home.

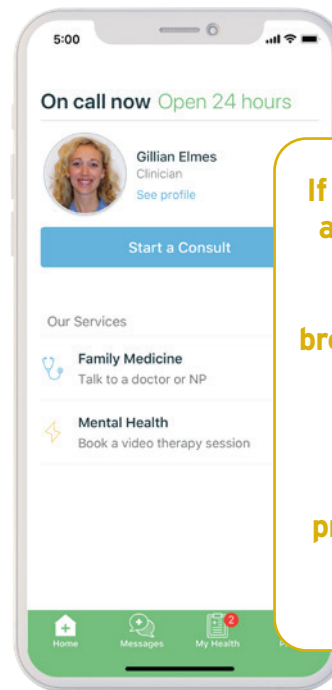
Disposable masks may be reused if they have been worn in an area with a low prevalence of COVID-19, and kept in a

paper bag for three days between uses. Never re-use a soiled disposable mask.

**5) Keep your glasses from fogging up.** To prevent your glasses from fogging up while wearing your mask (which may happen more with the colder weather), ensure your mask is snug-fitting to prevent air from escaping behind your lenses. Putting your glasses on after your mask will also help prevent fogging.

**6) Avoid cross-contamination with your cell phone.** A 2018 survey found that we use our cell phones up to 52 times per day and that they are 10 times dirtier than a public toilet. Holding a contaminated phone up to your face while wearing a mask may contaminate the mask, so take care to wipe down your phone with 70% iso-propyl alcohol or a disinfectant wipe regularly.

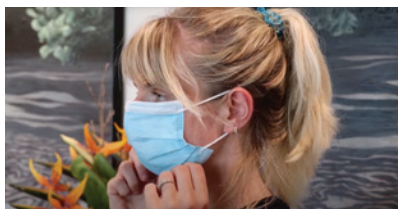
**7) Sneeze or cough into your elbow.** Cold and flu season will soon be upon us, so remember to still cough or sneeze into your elbow even while wearing a mask. Masks offer a level of protection to the wearer and more protection to those around the wearer, but they are still porous – meaning that droplets from sneezes and coughs can travel through them.



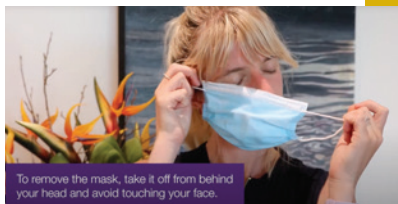
**If you have questions about correct mask use or experience rashes, difficulty breathing or any other concerns related to masking, start a virtual consult with a healthcare professional through Akira by TELUS Health.**



Cover your mouth and nose with the mask.



Avoid touching the mask while you're wearing it.



To remove the mask, take it off from behind your head and avoid touching your face.



**Watch**  
our short video to learn  
how to safely wear and take  
off a face mask.

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# WORKPLACE SUICIDE PREVENTION

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September 10th is World Suicide Prevention Day, and while it's not often talked about - especially at work - suicide affects hundreds of Canadians daily. An average of 275 people attempt suicide every day in Canada and an average of 11 people die from it.<sup>1</sup>

We cannot ignore the association between work and suicide. We know that every 1% increase in unemployment can result in a 1% increase in Canada's suicide rate<sup>2</sup>, and that 70% of all suicide deaths in Canada are among working-aged adults between the ages of 30 and 64.

Moreover, a June 2020 study revealed that unemployment as a result of COVID-19 could lead to more than 2,000 suicide deaths on top of our nation's annual rate of about 4,000.<sup>3</sup>

We Canadians spend upwards of 60% of our waking hours at work<sup>4</sup>, so our experiences there can deeply impact our lives. If a co-worker or a co-worker's loved one dies from suicide, their team members and the entire organization often struggle with the loss.



Many Canadians were already facing significant mental health challenges and unfortunately, the pandemic has made all of us more vulnerable to mental illness. We asked psychotherapist and Medisys supported by TELUS Health physician Dr. Kathee Andrews for advice on workplace suicide prevention in our pandemic world:

### 1) What should employers do now to help prevent suicide within their workforces?

The first step in providing mental health support is acknowledging and understanding that mental health is a serious medical concern and creating a stigma-free environment for employees. Organizations should have formal mental health programs in place for employees to access when needed for stress management, depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, and marital or other family stress.

It is equally important for employers to encourage and facilitate social connections (especially for teams who are new to working from home) and to create an open, welcoming environment where employees feel safe to discuss work related stress with their colleagues. [Click here](#) to download our Corporate Wellness Guide for today's world.

Even though it's a difficult subject, Suicide Prevention Day should be a topic of open discussion in the workplace. Promoting the day company wide opens the door for communication around awareness of risk factors, prevention measures and support services available.

### 2) What suicide warning signs should Canadians look for among their employees, peers and families?

It's important to distinguish between risk factors for suicide and warning signs. Risk factors include an existing mental illness (E.g. depression or severe anxiety), a history of previous suicide attempts, substance abuse (including alcohol and cannabis), social isolation, living with a chronic disease or disability and being an Indigenous person or member of the LGBTQ community.

Warning signs, on the other hand, include a decline in work performance that is out of character (E.g. late or failing to attend meetings, failure to complete tasks, reduced self-care), becoming increasingly withdrawn at work or at home, a marked change in mood, complaints of high anxiety, expressing a feeling of hopelessness or worthlessness, as well as "taking stock" or giving away personal items for no clear reason. Sometimes, the warning signs are not obvious or there are no signs at all.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/fast-facts/>

<sup>2</sup><https://nationalpost.com/health/covid-19-canada-unemployment-depression-suicide>

<sup>3</sup><https://nationalpost.com/health/covid-19-canada-unemployment-depression-suicide>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.suicideinfo.ca/resource/workplace-suicide-prevention/>

### 3) What should we do if we suspect someone is at risk?

The most valuable thing you can do is to gently reach out. You can always express concern and ask them how they are doing to open the conversation. If you are concerned about suicide, it's ok to ask if they have suicidal thoughts or to ask, "Are you feeling that you might hurt yourself?"

Contrary to common belief, asking someone if they are having thoughts of suicide will not make them suicidal. Rather, asking directly about thoughts of suicide signals that you care, that you realize they may be considering suicide and that you are ready to talk with them about it. This can be an uncomfortable question to ask but the opportunity to discuss the feelings and emotions surrounding suicide is often a great relief to people. Be ready to listen. Come prepared with information and resources and stay with them until you can direct them to a professional or a family member who can support them. Importantly, know your limits. If you are not trained to manage these situations and they are uncomfortable for you, it's important to acknowledge that and let them know you'll help to get them the professional support they need.

### 4) How should an organization handle a suicide within their workforce?

If there is a death by suicide within a workplace, it is important to allow employees to process the event in their own way and in their own time. A suicide may impact the psychological health of team members on many levels. The organization should share as much information as is provided by the family and allow employees time to attend any memorial services, where appropriate.

If an employee assistance program (EAP) program is not already available, employers should make grief counsellors available for anyone who feels they would benefit from counselling. Some employees may express anger and project blame on the workplace or the company. While that might be an expression of grief, employers should carefully consider whether there are workplace issues that might have contributed to the employee's distress and consider making any changes to address those issues.

If you or a loved one is having suicidal thoughts, contact the Canadian Suicide Prevention Service at 1-833-456-4566 or text 45645 between 4:00 pm and midnight EST.

Medisys is here to support you and your co-workers with free mental health resources. [Click here](#) to access our mental health e-challenge and [here](#) for expert articles on mental wellness.





# CONSIDERING A DETOX? IT MAY AFFECT MORE THAN YOUR BODY

By Beth Nanson, Registered Dietitian, Copeman Healthcare

We've all heard about detoxing. The "back to school" season signals the end of summer – and the end of BBQs and beach gatherings where we may have overindulged. It's common to feel the urge to "cleanse" the body of built-up toxins, and to start fresh in the Fall with better habits. But what we don't hear enough about are the risks associated with detoxing. Detoxing your body and rapidly losing weight may sound appealing, but let's examine the science.

## What exactly is a detox?

A detox is a form of a restrictive eating – typically, a liquid diet – that may or may not include the intake of additional supplements. They are usually marketed to promote weight loss, increase energy and improve overall health.

## What the science says

Yes, our bodies do accumulate toxins, but there is no scientific evidence to support the claim that detoxes are able to remove harmful toxins from our bodies.

Our organs work around the clock to detoxify our body all day and night. In fact, if our bodies didn't do such a good job at removing toxins, we wouldn't live very long. Consider this:

- Our lungs constantly breathe in oxygen and breathe out excess carbon dioxide, removing this waste product from circulation
- Our liver metabolizes alcohol, hormones, medications and environmental toxins
- Our kidneys act as a filter, reabsorbing what we need back into the blood and excreting anything we don't need, like waste or toxins, into urine
- Our skin allows the release of sweat, which is mostly composed of water but also contains some waste products and possibly heavy metals
- Our gut makes daily decisions regarding what to absorb into circulation and what to excrete



If you really think about it, our bodies are naturally detoxing all day long. There is also no scientific data supporting the long-term effectiveness of detoxing, whether it be for weight loss or improved health.

## Mental and physical drawbacks

The mental and physical drawbacks of detoxing are interconnected. Many people find eliminating solid foods mentally and physically draining, and when combined with the added stressors associated with going back to work and/or school during the next phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, this can be taxing on our mental health.

Detoxing can also harm our relationship with food since an overly-restrictive diet can lead to bingeing, which may result in negative food associations and feelings of guilt or shame. Furthermore, restricting calorie intake may lead to increases in production of our stress hormone, cortisol. Cortisol is linked to weight gain, which makes any weight loss experienced in the short term difficult to sustain.

Ultimately, if you're feeling mentally or physically depleted, the detox is not living up to its claim of making you feel better and increasing your energy.

## Why do we keep hearing that detoxes are helpful?

Detoxing often feels successful at first because you will start to notice changes rapidly when you stop eating solid food.

You may experience some weight loss with a detox, but this is due to a loss of water from breaking down carbohydrate stores, not just from a reduction in calorie intake. This type of weight loss is not sustainable, unless you are planning to continue the detox forever, which is not recommended!

During a detox, you're also removing many processed and sugary foods from your diet, which may contribute to feeling better, but you can also receive this benefit while consuming solid foods.

Lastly, there may be some placebo effect. Your brain and your body are so intricately connected that sometimes when you are expecting certain results, your body can generate them without any active treatment.

## Are detoxes unsafe?

There is potential for harmful side effects from detoxes and it should be noted that no commercial detox programs have been tested for safety and efficacy.

Restrictive diets also come with mental and physical health risks including a slowed metabolism, which makes it harder to manage your weight long-term. Other side effects from detoxes may include muscle loss, nutritional deficiencies, fatigue, dizziness, anxiety, irritability, cramps, hair loss, nausea and constipation.

If you decide to go ahead with a detox, it's advisable to consult with a registered dietitian, especially if you have a pre-existing medical condition.

## Optimize your natural detox pathways

If you want your organs to do their best work, you cannot deprive them of the nutrients they need to function optimally. Instead, help enhance your natural detox pathways by following these tips:

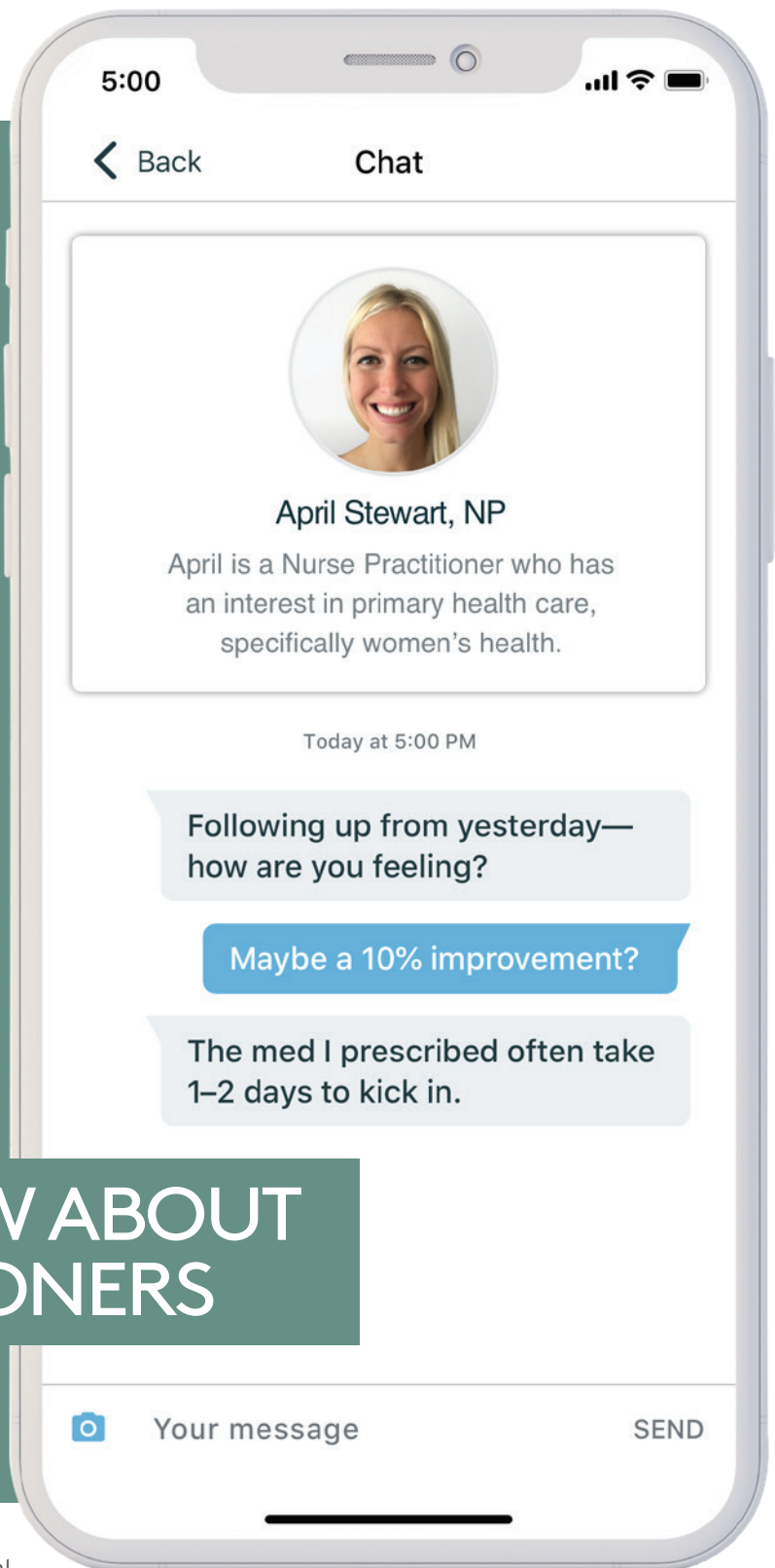
- Include cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli and cauliflower in your diet as well as berries, artichokes, garlic, onions, leeks and green tea. These foods contain nutrients that can regulate our liver's detoxification and antioxidant activity.
- Consume plenty of fibre from fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and whole grains. Fibre acts both directly (by binding bile and its associated toxins to facilitate their excretion) and indirectly (by feeding our gut bacteria, many of which go on to produce by-products that can act on the liver and kidneys to enhance their ability to excrete toxins).
- Drink plenty of water, as this will help the kidneys excrete urine and daily toxins.
- Consume adequate lean protein, which is critical to maintaining optimum levels of glutathione, the body's master detoxification enzyme!
- Sweat multiple times each week!
- Decrease your exposure to known contaminants and toxins (smoke, pollution, pesticides in foods, alcohol, illicit drugs, heavy metals and mercury, to name a few).

## The bottom line

Having a healthy relationship with food is essential for personal health. We encourage you to **consult a Registered Dietitian** to help you start, or continue, to optimize your health through food and to navigate any detox programs you may be considering.

# 5

## THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT NURSE PRACTITIONERS



If you've used Akira by TELUS Health for a virtual medical consult, you've probably already connected with one of our Nurse Practitioners (NPs) – 40% of our clinicians have this designation, but a lot of Canadians don't know a lot about what an NP does or can do.

Did you know that Nurse Practitioners (NPs) have a graduate degree, clinical experience, and have completed license examinations? All of our clinicians are Canadian and licensed to practice within the provinces and territories where they work, but NPs can practice medicine autonomously, write prescriptions, make referrals, diagnose and treat illness.

## Here are five things to know about Nurse Practitioners:

### 1) They have advanced education and clinical experience.

Prospective Nurse Practitioners must complete a four-year nursing degree and have a minimum of two years of clinical experience as Registered Nurses (in most jurisdictions). Successful NP candidates then complete an additional two years of full-time education and must pass their NP examinations in order to practice.

### 2) They can practice autonomously.

As independent practitioners, NPs provide a wide range of general medical advice in areas including pregnancy-related concerns, pediatric growth and development questions, over-the-counter medication guidance, travel medicine, sun safety questions, and general patient education. They can also triage all symptoms appropriately.

### 3) They can write prescriptions, request imaging and lab work, and make referrals.

Nurse Practitioners can provide new prescriptions for the treatment of a wide range of issues, such as infections, mental health concerns, blood pressure and cholesterol management, osteoarthritis, dermatological issues, and more. They can also refill existing prescription (excluding narcotics) made by other healthcare professionals.

NPs can also complete referrals for medical imaging (x-ray, ultrasounds, etc.), and specialists (neurologists, physiotherapists, dermatologists, cardiologists, etc.), as well as request lab work and analyze results. When appropriate, in-person consultations are recommended prior to referrals; some of those instances include MRIs and CT scans.

### 4) They specialize in managing chronic conditions and conducting holistic health assessments.

Nurse Practitioner education focuses on the management of chronic conditions and holistic health assessment, including screening for risk, diagnosis and treatment of a wide range of illnesses, as well as health promotion. This robust training makes NPs an excellent first line of defence against illness and disease.

Like many health practitioners, NPs can have various specialties such as mental health, pediatrics, travel medicine, and acute care. Akira's NPs work closely together, lean on each other's specialties, and consult with the team's in-house specialists to provide the best possible care to their patients.

### 5) They provide all types of support.

Akira by TELUS Health's team of Nurse Practitioners provide a broad range of support for Canadians when they need it the most. Trained to have a holistic approach, they consider every factor when providing a diagnosis and treatment plan. Many of the NPs available on TELUS Health's virtual care solution specialize in helping patients suffering from depression and anxiety through Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques and identifying community resources.

Nurse Practitioners take care of their patients to the fullest extent, providing general medical advice, writing prescriptions or referrals, and following up with patients a few days later to see how they are doing or how their medication is working. Akira by TELUS Health's team of NPs provide a level of care that consistently earns positive, grateful feedback from patients across the country.

## Did you know?

Whether they live at home or away, your children 26 years old and under (and your spouse!) have access to on-demand, secure medical consults with **Akira by TELUS Health**. Make sure your family members' profiles are activated today so they can quickly seek medical care as they need it – at home, at work, or at school.



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