

DATA SLICE #47

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Older Adults are More Likely to Avoid COVID-19 Information

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Older adults are at higher risk of dying from COVID-19 but less interested in information that might lower the risk of getting or spreading the disease. In the first months of the pandemic, older adults were less likely than younger adults to consume COVID-19 information or media (see Figure 1). In addition, older adults spent more effort to avoid COVID-19 information, including information related to local infection rates, COVID-19 symptoms, and stay-at-home orders. In part, avoidance was associated with age differences in knowledge: Older adults held more existing knowledge and were less interested in preparing for the future by obtaining new information. At the same time, information avoidance was associated with age differences in emotional experience and preferences. Older adults reported feeling calmer and were more interested in protecting their feelings and present circumstances than younger adults were. Thus, COVID-19 information is less attractive to those who focus on their feelings and want to maintain the status quo (such as older adults) than those who focus on gathering information and want to prepare for the future (such as younger adults). To keep older adults up to date on COVID-19 developments, government and health officials should not assume that older adults will make use of publicly available information but instead, should directly target communication efforts at older adults.

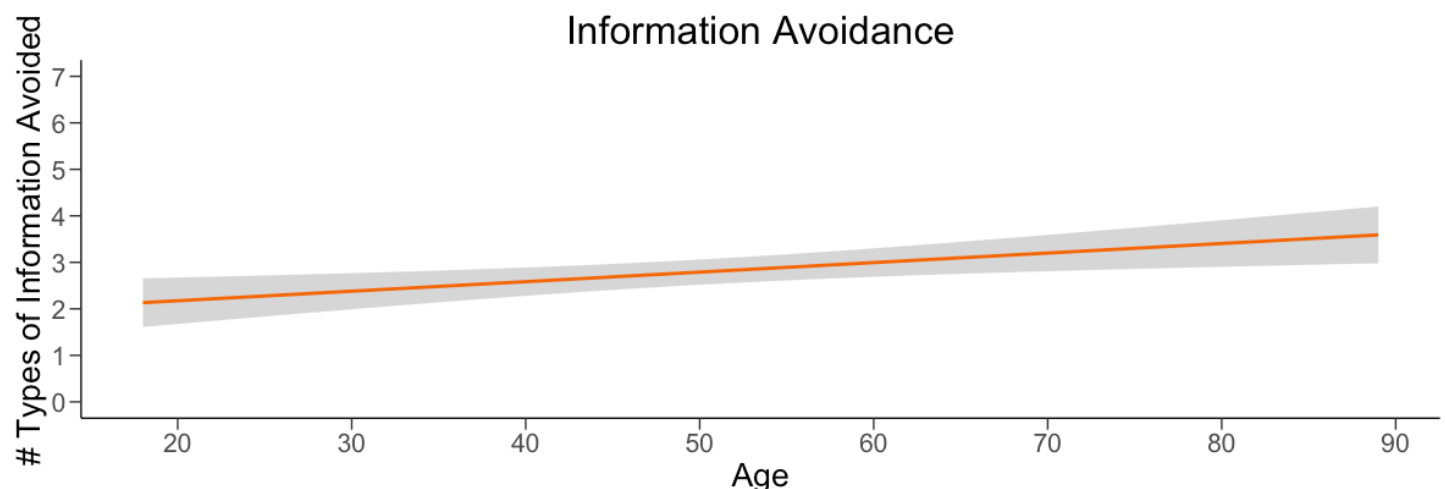


Figure 1: Information Avoidance by Age

Data Source: Nolte, J., Deng, S. L., & Löckenhoff, C. E. (2021). Age differences in media consumption and avoidance with respect to COVID-19. *Journals of Gerontology, Series B*, gbab123. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbab123>.

Note: N= 500. Information avoidance was indexed as the number of types of information intentionally avoided (such as information about local infection rates, COVID-19 symptoms, or stay-at-home orders), ranging from zero to seven.

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