connected, however little is known about how older adults have used technology and the impact it has had on their mental health and connectedness. This study was to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced older adult mental health and social connectedness, with a particular emphasis on how technology has played a role. One-on-one interviews (N=29) were conducted with adults aged 65+ (Mean age=71.5; 86% female) via phone/Zoom. Participants were asked open-ended questions about the impact social distancing has had on their quality of life, health, and social connectedness as well as their technology use to remain connected. Findings highlight the mental health stressors experienced by older adults during the pandemic, as well as the most resiliency and innovation. In speaking of the isolation and its effect on her mental health, one participant said, “I thought fighting cancer was bad, but this is worse.” Nearly all of the participants had used technology in some form to remain connected to others, which the most common being a smart phone to call, text, and video-interface. One participant commented, “You can’t beat an iPhone. How in the world could we ever live without an iPhone?” Many participants had learned a new technology during the pandemic, such as Zoom. Our findings raise the possibility that technology may be a good strategy for enhancing well-being of aging population amid the pandemic.

PREFERRED COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AMONG OLDER ADULTS DURING COVID-19
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Social distancing measures put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic limited in-person interactions and may have increased the risk for social isolation and loneliness in older adults.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to understand the communication channels used by older adults (age 50+) during the COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate social isolation and loneliness.

Methods: Older adults (n=22) who were selected from a longitudinal study, ‘Aging in the time of COVID,’ and who had self-reported they successfully avoided loneliness, participated in a semi-structured online interview. Participants were asked to describe the communication techniques and efforts they used to stay connected to family and friends during the pandemic. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. A thematic analysis approach was used to identify common approaches.

Results: Participants were primarily female and white (100%) with a mean age of 64.7 years. Preliminary findings (n=5) suggest older adults relied heavily on technology to facilitate communication with family and friends including texting, phone calls, email, video calls or conferences (e.g., Zoom), WhatsApp and social media, primarily Facebook. In-person communication strategies, including one-on-one and small group gatherings following social distancing guidelines, were preferred, but used less often than technology-based approaches. Living close to friends and family, and previous experience with technology were facilitators.