Tips on How to Maintain Your Mental Wellness During COVID-19

Take breaks
from watching, reading or listening to news stories including social media. Hearing about current events repeatedly can be upsetting.

Take deep breaths,
stretch or meditate.

Try to eat healthy,
well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep and avoid alcohol and drugs.

Make time to unwind.

Talk with people you trust
about your concerns and how you are feeling.

The Center Support Line
A free, 24-hour talk line open to our community during difficult times. If you are feeling stressed, anxious, or just need someone to talk to, call—we can help.

The Center Support Line: 970.252.6220

www.centermh.org • Call 970.252.3200 to learn more or to make an appointment.
In Uncertain Times, Anxiety and Stress Can Increase

It is understandable that individuals can feel overwhelmed with emotions like fear, anxiety and stress. These emotions can manifest in:

- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs

Everyone Reacts Differently

It is also important to remember that everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. How a person responds to the current situation can depend on your background, the things that make you different from other people, and the community you live in. There is no right or wrong way to respond to something of this magnitude. Having patience with yourself, and your loved ones, will help navigate through this challenging time. Keep in mind individuals listed below may respond more strongly to this kind of stress:

- Older people and people with chronic diseases who are at higher risk for COVID-19
- People who have mental health conditions including problems with substance use
- People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors and other health care providers, or first responders
- Children and teens

Knowing the Facts Can Reduce Stress

One way to reduce stress is to check reputable sources about COVID-19. A great resource to check regularly is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov. They have a full site that provides the latest information and facts on COVID-19, including how to keep yourself healthy; what to do if you get sick; resources for caregivers; and more.

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Staying Socially Connected While Physical Distancing

The current COVID-19 public health issue and its many stressors can increase feelings of isolation, despair and anxiety – even among those who haven’t experienced these feelings in the past. These are common reactions in times of uncertainty or when there’s a perception of danger. Social connection has proven critical to providing support for these feelings, and for helping reduce stress. However, in an era of physical distancing, it may seem challenging to provide this type of support to friends and family.

See below for information on how to provide support during this challenging time:

Connecting During Physical Distancing

• Utilize technology to bridge the physical distance between family, friends, neighbors and colleagues.
• Check-in with people often – even a quick text or phone call can make the difference.
• Get online. Social media is a wonderful way to stay updated and connected, as well as foster social connections with those around you.

Take Care of Yourself

• Practice self-care and mindfulness – and encourage family and friends to do the same.
• You don’t have to be “perfect” to cope successfully. Everyone is making it up as they go along and doing their best.
• Set aside time everyday to step away from the news and enjoy other activities.

Recognize and Respond When Someone is Reaching Out for Help

Treat a mental health issue the same way you would treat a physical health issue. Do not hesitate to check back in regularly as a trusted resource.

Seek Professional Help

Are you experiencing a crisis? Call 970.252.6220 or 1.844.493.8255 (TALK) or text TALK to 38255.

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1. **Talk to your children about COVID-19 in an age appropriate manner.** Children are looking to adults for guidance on how understand and react to stressful situations. Calmly providing an age appropriate explanation and reassurance will put children’s worries at ease.
   - PBS News Hour - 10 Tips for talking about COVID-19 with your kids
   - CDC - Talking with children about Coronavirus Disease 2019

2. **Name feelings.** During this time of stress, parents and children will experience a range of intense emotion. Talking about feelings in relation to COVID-19 will help. Research shows that naming emotions supports children (and parents) in feeling seen, heard and understood. In addition, it helps regulate emotions so that we can regain capacities to think and problem solve, which are essential these times.
   - “I can see that you are worried. You are asking so many great questions.”
   - “I know you are really frustrated that we are not able to go to the store or recreation center.”
   - “Mom is really stressed right now but you don’t need to worry. Mom can take care of it.”

3. **Discussing and creating a schedule that works for your family.** Consistency and predictability are key to managing anxiety. Sit down with your family to create a schedule that allows for time for work, play and relaxation.
   - San Jose Mercury news has a printable and customizable schedule maker - What to do with kids out of school closed by coronavirus? Use this free schedule-maker to plan the day
   - Canva.com - Create Brilliant Weekly Schedules

4. **Find a time during the day to do what helps you relax.** It’s important to do this as a family but equally important to allow for time alone. Allowing for alone time will support feeling recharged and less overwhelmed.
   - Reading a book, crafts, handiwork around the house, having a cup of tea or special comfort food
   - Creating a “chill out corner” can also be helpful for young kids, you can include blankets, pillows, books, fidget toys, etc.

5. **Stay in touch with friends and family members.** It is vital during an isolation period to still feel connected to others. By doing so, you have an outlet to share what’s going on with yourself and others. *We’re all in this together!*
   - Call a friend or video chat
   - Write letters

6. **Keep moving.** It is very important to still move our bodies while being stuck at home. This not only is important for our physical health but necessary for our mental health.
   - Play sports (soccer, basketball, football, etc.)
   - Cosmic Kids Yoga
7. **Get outside.** It is a challenge to be inside all day, especially for young children that have never ending energy. Create time each day for you to step time outside. The fresh air will be good for you and your child.
   - Go for a bike ride or walk
   - Start a small garden
   - Make a picnic
   - Make a scavenger hunt looking for birds, bugs and plants.

8. **Limit news.** For your mental health and the mental health of your children, limit the news. Find a balance between staying informed and managing your family’s anxiety. Limit yourself to checking the news in the morning, mid-day and after work.

9. **Take it day by day and have compassion for yourself.** It is hard to predict what will happen tomorrow, next week or in a month. Thinking of all the what-ifs associated with the future can generate stress and anxiety. Take it day by day and do so with compassion. This situation is new to all of us and we are all doing the best we can. *Be nice to yourself!*

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Managing Anxiety with COVID-19

These days, it seems impossible to go anywhere, listen to anything, or watch any shows without hearing about the COVID-19 outbreak.

Though I wasn’t particularly concerned about this virus at first, I have become increasingly anxious as wide-spread closures occur. Going to the grocery store has become an anxiety-producing event because of the empty shelves and the general air of panic. My rising anxiety has become intense enough that I have had to develop strategies for managing it. So as a parent, a community member, and a concerned citizen, I have found the following to be helpful:

1. **As much or as little as you need to, limit the time you spend taking in information** about COVID-19 via the media or through contact with other people as you are able. Take note when the information becomes too much for you and stop for the day. (For me, this means that I can spend no more than fifteen minutes checking the latest updates from the county, the school district, or the Center for Disease Control before I have to get off social media because I can feel my anxiety levels rising.)

2. **Try to maintain a routine**, preferably one as close to your normal routine as possible. Stay hydrated, eat at least two small meals with protein daily, exercise, and rest.

3. **Follow the suggested guidelines**—it stresses me out to see neighborhood kids congregating together when we’ve been told to practice social distancing. Even though it’s hard to keep the kids from playing with their friends, it may be even more stressful for others to see that people aren’t following the rules. We want to work together to help everyone out.

4. **Be kind and considerate to others**—it’s amazing what a little kindness does to ease everyone’s fears and anxiety. Really consider whether you need all that toilet paper. Maybe try using less instead of buying more.

5. **Spend your day engaged in activities that bring you joy.** This could be horseback riding, doing yoga, cooking, or going for a walk while maintaining the social distancing guidelines. Don’t forget to smile and say hello to those you see.

6. **If you’re working from home, take breaks** to check in with friends and family, play a game, watch fun videos, or meditate.

7. **Control your thoughts – focus on the positive.** This could be a daily gratitude or mindfulness practice. Be aware your focus may be shorter than on “regular” days; that is to be expected.

8. **Call, Facetime, Skype, text or otherwise connect** with people you care about.

9. **Laugh and be silly.** Laughter creates endorphins for the body that help you feel good.

10. **Rely on your belief system.** Remind yourself of what you believe. Focus on that because this too shall pass.

If each of us can manage our anxiety a little more, we may help others to manage theirs. I know how much it helps me to connect with people who are calm and steady during a situation like this. I hope that by managing my own anxiety, I can be that steadying presence for others.

If you find that you need someone to talk to, or are having trouble managing your own stress or anxiety, call our new support line listed below or call 970.252.3200 to ask about setting up an appointment via phone or video.

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