

COVID-19 OUTBREAK: TIPS FOR COPING & SELF-CARE

During this unprecedented time of health and economic crisis brought about the Covid-19 outbreak, you have likely found yourself experiencing feelings of stress, anxiety, anger, fear, grief, guilt, or even panic. It is important for you know that these are **normal, common and natural responses** during a crisis – particularly, infectious disease outbreaks which are extremely distressing due to the high levels of uncertainty and chaos that they can produce. Further, because disease outbreaks don't have a clear time boundary like other crises or natural disasters (ie, surviving an earthquake), they can leave people in an ongoing state of fear, where one is constantly braced for a threat over a long period of time. This kind of extended stress can have a significant toll on your wellbeing, and for this reason it is essential to find ways to cope in order to keep the stress from becoming overwhelming or incapacitating. The following tips and strategies can help you manage your distress and to support yourself during social-distancing and quarantine.

SET AND MAINTAIN A NEW ROUTINE



- Disruptions in routines can be stressful. Routines provide a sense of predictability, structure, and security which is stabilizing in times of uncertainty. Create a schedule with set times for waking up, meals, and bedtime, as well as other structured activities (exercise, quiet time, social time, hobbies, etc) to fill your day.
- If working or taking classes from home, set hours similar to those on worked on site; it can be helpful to designate a specific space in your home for work activities where you can minimize distractions.

MAINTAIN A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE



- Eat more nutritious, whole foods whenever possible. Processed foods, sugar, and caffeine contribute to disruptions in our mood. Eat regularly to keep your blood sugar stable. Dips in blood sugar levels, which happen when we don't eat enough food, or after we eat a lot of sugar and then crash, for example also cause mood issues
- Get enough sleep—it's probably more than you think you need. You need lots of rest to combat the intense pressure being exerted on your nervous system during this stressful time.
- Move your body every day. Physical activity is a great way to move some of our anxious or despairing energy up and out of our bodies. Try an online exercise or yoga class, or go outdoors.

SPEND SOME TIME OUTSIDE



- Spending time outside can lead to significant health benefits. First, being in sunlight helps you get Vitamin D which is important for your bones, blood cells and immune system.
- Sunlight helps keep your serotonin levels up. This helps raise your energy and keeps your mood calm, positive, and focused.
- The outdoors helps set your sleep cycle. Cells in your eyes need enough light to get your body's internal clock working right.
- Time in nature can boost your creative problem-solving skills. The more time you spend, the bigger the benefit, but even just "getting out for some air" can nudge your brain into a new thought pattern.

STAY MENTALLY ACTIVE



- Its important to keep your mind active. Try learning a new hobby or skill, start a new puzzle (sudoku, crossword puzzles, or jigsaw puzzle), or challenge yourself to learn a new language.
- There are many resources online for free online classes, such as coursera.com.

LIMIT MEDIA COVERAGE



- You can limit your stress and worry by lessening the time you spend consuming media coverage that is upsetting.
- Be mindful of news and information is coming from reputable, sources. Gather factual information from credible, trustworthy sources such as the WHO or CDC.

NAME YOUR WORRIES & LIMIT TRIGGERS



- Take a moment and identify what you are actually worried about: your health or your family's? Financial instability? Access to resources?
- Its likely to be a combination of stressors, but when they are all mashed up together, the stress can be overwhelming or incapacitating. Identifying them and breaking them can make them for manageable
- Notice what are some of the triggers to your worries: Checking the news every hour? Spending too time on social media? Consider limiting the amount of time you spend or designating a particular time of day that you use to check news or engage social media.

FIND WAYS TO RELAX



- Its important to build in time for relaxation and pleasure into your daily routine; its less important what relaxing or pleasurable activities you are doing as you are actively doing something that helps you feel better and distract you from your worries.
- Consider reading a book, listening to music or a favorite podcast, playing a board or video game, engaging in arts and crafts, creative writing, or trying a new recipe.
- Find an app that teaches you meditation, try deep breathing or yoga to bring you back to a place of equilibrium.

DEVELOP A PRACTICE OF GRATITUDE



- Expressing and receiving gratitude induces our brain to release neurochemicals (dopamine and serotonin) that are responsible for positive emotions such as happiness and joy, and thus the practice of gratitude can enhance your mood immediately.
- Simple practices like making time at the end of each day to reflect on what you are thankful for or sending small tokens and thank you notes can make us feel a lot better.
- Consider starting a gratitude journal or a gratitude jar that you add gratitude notes to each day.

STAY CONNECTED WITH OTHERS



- Psychological research shows that social connection and support are crucial in developing emotional resilience. Stay connected with your close circle of friends, family, and colleagues by being intentional about reaching out and proactive about scheduling time together through the means that you have available to you.
- Build time to help others. Call others who may be more isolated or help out neighbors who might struggle to access resources by dropping off meals, groceries, medications, mail, etc. at their doorstep. Find other ways to volunteer safely.