



COVID-19 RESPONSE

TIPS FOR LOWERING STRESS DUE TO COVID-19

Learn about lowering and managing stress levels from COVID-19.

During the past several weeks, we have entered an uncertain time in the world due to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The public was asked to practice social distancing and stay home to slow down the spread of the virus. Staying home is an important step to slow down the virus, but it can be stressful. Our body has a built-in system that will send out signals when it is stressed. These stress signals can be different with each individual; some people get nervous and shaky, while others get sweaty. It is important to know how your body reacts so you can manage and lower your stress. Following are some tips to help you lower that stress while at home.

MANAGE NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

Have you felt like you are angrier or sadder than normal? Are you getting frustrated more easily? In times like these, it can be very easy to feel stressed and overwhelmed with all the changes and new demands (staying home, homeschooling). However, stress may present itself as a different emotion, such as anger, sadness or another negative emotion. Try not to dwell on these negative emotions and find something positive to focus on. Other suggestions include:

1. Create a schedule and prioritize: It can be challenging to stay at home for an extended amount of time. You may feel isolated and unproductive, which can lead to feeling guilty or depressed. Creating a routine can help maintain a sense of normalcy. Organize your day by listing what tasks you need to complete that day. Once you have that list, prioritize what tasks need to be completed first. It can be fun to schedule different activities each day for variety in your schedule. For example, in the middle of the day, maybe schedule a

picnic in your yard one day and a walk the next day. It is important to find a balance between routine and something exciting to remain positive while staying at home. Keep in mind these are extraordinary circumstances, so some things may not work out as planned. Just try to stay flexible!

2. Limit media exposure: There is a lot of news coverage surrounding COVID-19. It can be overwhelming at times. It is important to stay informed, but make sure you are getting reliable information. Some news coverage may exaggerate or emphasize certain aspects that can be scary. If you are feeling overwhelmed, limit how much time is spent reading or watching the news.

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3. Practice effective coping mechanisms: Coping mechanisms can help lower stress and negative emotions. There are many coping strategies. Pick the ones that work for you:

a. Exercise

Exercising regularly supports both mental and physical health. With exercise, your body releases endorphins – natural hormones that help create a positive mood. It specifically helps lower stress and negative emotions by shifting your focus from how you are feeling to devoting energy to exercise. There are various types of exercise that one could do from home including strength training (<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/strength-training/art-20046031>)

b. Meditation

Meditation is a great way to create a sense of calm. There are various types of meditation, each has different focus and techniques. For example, guided meditation focuses on creating a mental image that could help you to calm. You can find further details and recommendation here: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/meditation/in-depth/meditation/art-20045858>

c. Write a journal

Writing down how you feel could potentially help sort through your emotions and thoughts. It provides time to process experiences and reflect upon them. It also could provide an opportunity to reframe the experience. For example, look for the positive things and find the silver lining or lesson learned from the experience. A gratitude journal can be used. Further information is available here: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/tips_for_keeping_a_gratitude_journal

d. Going on a walk

Going on a walk could be a good idea to integrate into your routine. It provides an opportunity to take a break from your indoor routine and breathe some fresh air. Enjoy your favorite music or podcast while walking, or you could say hi to people around the neighborhood – while practicing physical distancing, of course.

e. Get creative

Art provides an outlet for self-expression. This could be especially helpful to introduce some fun and variety while staying at home. Explore many different forms of art, from painting to pottery. Most art supplies can be found at a local craft store or online. Remember, there are no rules to art!

CHANGE YOUR THINKING

In the current situation, it may be easier to focus on the negatives rather than the positives. Focusing on the

positives helps prevent additional stress that can take a toll on our physical and mental health. One skill is changing the way we think. First, recognize any negative thoughts about a situation. Then, replace that negative thought with a positive one. For example, Johnny is worrying about getting sick. However, Johnny refocuses on the fact that he does not have any symptoms and feels healthy. After successfully finding a way to manage negative emotions, it should help to achieve a clear mind. Then, proceed to solve the source of frustration or stress, if needed.

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

A healthy lifestyle is essential to staying healthy and flattening the COVID-19 curve. Be sure to eat a balanced diet and avoid smoking and abusing substances, such as alcohol or drugs. Also, make sure you are getting enough sleep, approximately seven to eight hours each night. Lastly, frequently wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds as recommended by the CDC to prevent COVID-19 from spreading.

SUPPORT

Stay connected with family and the community: It can get pretty lonely and isolating while practicing social distancing. However, being connected with others helps to reduce the feeling of isolation and keeps some sense of normalcy. With today's technology, we still can be connected with others while staying at home. Phone or video calls allow us to stay in touch with our loved ones. Video calls also can allow family moments, such as birthday parties or anniversaries, to happen because members are able to see what is going on. Many organizations provide opportunities to stay connected with the community. Religious groups, for example, broadcast services that provide the opportunity to be connected with the group.

Seek help, if necessary: Life during a pandemic can be overwhelming. If you experience significant mental distress, seek help from a mental health professional. Many are providing online counseling and also may offer financial assistance to those who are experiencing financial difficulties.

TOO MUCH STRESS IS BAD FOR YOU!

Stress is not something anyone likes to feel. We need a little stress to help motivate us to complete a project on time. However, experiencing high levels of stress for long periods of time can be very harmful to our physical and mental health. Stress has been linked to high blood pressure, weakened immune systems, depression and anxiety. By keeping our stress levels down, we can better protect our bodies and our minds.

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