

## 9 Ways to Cope and Manage Stress: How to Improve Your Mental Health During COVID-19 and Thrive in Your Health Goals

- In times of drastic change, it's OK to feel out of sorts.
- Take this as an opportunity to go beyond surviving and instead thrive!
- Let this be a unique opportunity for change.

### Mental Health and COVID-19

It is normal during this time of fear to be stressed and anxious. It's our brain's way of protecting us.

#### *How to Cope and Manage Stress During COVID-19*

- Keep the Routine
  - Dress Up as if you were going out
  - Go Outside!
  - Move - Exercise
  - Don't stock up on the junk: Eat Well
  - Give Space
  - Address Vital Needs or Self-Care
  - Say it Out Loud
  - Practice feeling Good
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COVID-19 has made everything uncertain: finances, health, careers, school/college and social scene.

There is a silver lining if you choose to find it:

- Life has been forced to slow down
- Take time to now take care of yourself
- Take time to connect with those we didn't have time to connect with
- This is a great time to declutter or paint that room you've been meaning to.
- The stay at home orders have forced us to review what is important.

### Why Do I Feel Anxious about COVID-19?

- Feeling stressed, scared, panicked or being in denial are all valid feelings.
- Daily fear can build into panic, which may lead to stock piling supplies or seeking medical care for not urgent issues.
- However, chronic stress can cause denial of how serious the situation really is.
- Denial can be a way to avoid anxiety but instead, it becomes obstructive, and you ignore social isolation, fail to follow through on added hygiene recommendations.

## 9 Ways to Cope and Manage Stress for Better Mental Health During COVID-19

### #1 | Keep with Routine

- Keep your sleep/wake schedule
- Maintain regular routines if possible:
  - Exercise daily
  - Eat regular meals and snacks.
  - Embracing a routine can positively impact your mental health and counteract negative thoughts.
  - This helps maintain good sleep which keeps us all in a better mood.
  - Especially important for children. Routine gives them a sense of stability and safety.

### #2 | Dress Up As If You Were Going Out

- Attending to your personal grooming, helps you stay positive.
- Put on the make-up and you automatically feel better.
- Color obviously helps:
  - Yellow helps feelings of inspiration, happiness and optimism.
  - Green gives us a sense of calmness and hope.
  - Orange oozes warmth, energy and fun, and warmth.
  - No need for high heels, but keep it comfortable.

### #3 | Go Out!

- Social distancing does not mean that we must stay indoors at all times.
- Taking a walk in the park does the mind and body good, especially the greener it is.
- Nature therapy or Forest Bathing (!) significantly reduces stress.
- If you are worried about crowding, try different times of the day when there are fewer people around.
- Forest bathing is a traditional Japanese practice of immersing oneself in nature by mindfully using all five senses
  - See
  - Smell
  - Hear
  - Touch
  - Taste (?)

### #4 | Move - Exercise

- During times of stress, our first reaction may be to hibernate on the couch and stress eat, while watching TV late into the night.
- This is the time we need the exercise induced endorphins more than ever.
- Just start walking if the gyms are closed or even better, try the innovative Virtual Gyms.
- Just the smallest of change can lead to the next small step of change. Before you know it, you've developed or maintained the healthy habit.
- If you are like me, putting some form of exercise in your schedule and crossing it off at the end of the day is very satisfying, even if it was a 5 minute walk instead of your usual 20 minutes.
- This is the perfect opportunity to begin, continue or gain a new habit.

#### #5 | Don't stock up on the junk: Eat Well

- What we eat will optimize our immunity when we add it to proper sleep, activity and stress management.
- If stress eating is your coping mechanism, try drinking a glass of water and eating a piece of fruit before you automatically attack that sweet/cake/cookie.
- Stress eating is powered by our emotions. So if we can maintain our gratitude journal, we are less likely to be mindless and more mindful.

#### #6 | Give Space

- There are probably few people that are stressed.
- We all manifest stress in different ways, depending on how well we can articulate our emotions and concerns.
- Understand this the next time someone acts weird. I
- Don't forget this includes children who needs reassurance and basic TLC.

#### #7 | Address Vital Needs or Self-Care

- Self-care can be the embrace of a soft blanket, the beat of a good tune, or the fragrance streaming up from a warm mug cradled between your fingers.
- Self-care strategies are unique to each person, but usually involve sensory components such as touch, taste, sight, hearing, smell, or movement, explains Dr. Feliciano.
- There are many self-care ways to cope and manage stress: hot baths, facials, hugs, foot rubs, or [meditation](#).
- Swinging on a rocking chair, a weighted blanket, a coloring book, blowing bubbles, or writing in a journal are all forms of self-care.
- Consider putting many of these soothing favorites in one spot to create a retreat space. Having a place that feels safe and relaxing can help sooth emotions.
- Kids make forts: cozy, small spaces filled with soothing treasures that bring joy. Why not build your own?

#### #8 | Say it Out loud

- In times of stress, we gravitate to our support system: family, friends etc.
- Rely on your virtual support system to get an oxytocin hit, otherwise social distancing and working from home can turn into depression.
- Don't let working from home or social distancing make you feel isolated – that can make one feel depressed.
- Call, text, email, write letters, video call or talk across the neighbor's fence.
- We are all in this together – you'd be amazed at how empathy can go along way to make us feel better.

#### #9 | Practice Feeling Good

- Self-care is important now more than ever.
- It gives us the emotional fuel to help others.
- Just asking how others are managing during this time, whether it is the store clerk, shows that we care.
- Dropping off groceries for neighbors, buying food for the healthcare team or sewing cloth face masks for distribution makes us feel that we have a little control during these unpredictable times.