

BLOG

Juggling Wariness, Weariness, and Wellness: Breathe...but Not on Others

By Terrey L. Hatcher, on April 3, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to hit us all hard with unsettling contrasts that affect our emotional well-being. We may feel that we don't have enough information about the virus...but it sometimes feels as though we are hearing way too much. One minute we're on the verge of tears because so many aspects of our lives are suddenly out of our control, the next we're laughing out loud viewing memes and making fun of ourselves.

Whether you're a healthcare clinician on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic or a leader working from an office or home while trying to avoid catching the disease, the ups and downs are obvious and still so confusing.

The struggle to balance emotional well-being and pandemic precautions is real:

- Don't spread panic about the pandemic...but don't take it too lightly.
- Stay informed about the news...but don't watch too much too often.
- Take infection prevention seriously...but keep your sense of humor.
- Stay socially distant...but reach out for emotional connection.
- Take a breath...but don't breathe those droplets on others.

Separate, but Stressful

It's sometimes hard to know what to do to stay healthy from one minute to the next — not just physically healthy, but mentally healthy as well.



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[See more of Terrey's work →](#)

The dangers keep swirling around in our brains. We have the very real threat of getting physically sick ourselves or carrying the virus and getting someone else sick. But equally scary are the threats to our emotional well-being.

On top of the health challenges are unexpected work and financial shifts. Healthcare providers may be working long hours or preparing for an onslaught of patients. Friends and family members in other fields may be working from home, trying to be productive while isolated from colleagues. Others may not be working at all as businesses shut down to protect the public.

Stretching Our Limits

As we all try so hard to stay healthy and protect our family, our friends, our neighbors, and even strangers in the grocery store, we question how far to go.

We don't want to stress ourselves out so badly with worry that we sacrifice our enjoyment of life and loved ones. And we still aim to be productive and meet our work, family, and household obligations.

Behavioral health experts know that emotional health is a key to maintaining a strong immune system and avoiding physical illness. The mind-body connection is strong.

So even though we are all on heightened alert, paying attention to the precautions and the guidance from health experts and the government, we also need a break sometimes. When the stress starts building, we need to stop the laser focus on COVID-19 challenges and start addressing our own emotional well-being.

With that in mind, consider making [conscious choices](#) to boost your mental health amid all the concern about the potential effects of the coronavirus on your physical health. You may find some of the following strategies more helpful at one time or another, depending on your circumstances.

1. Set a Reasonable Schedule

If you're working remotely, the [Center for Workplace Mental Health](#) advises sticking to a regular schedule and not letting work encroach on your home life.

Of course, you also may be struggling to keep your home life from encroaching on your work with so many unusual challenges—family members at home, limited technical equipment, supply shortages, cats on your keyboard—happening at once. It's a delicate balance these days.

When you're working, it can help to turn on video during meetings with colleagues. Pro tip: Keep those sweats out of sight and your collared shirt in the webcam view.

In another turnabout, it's encouraged to chat about personal stuff during work time now. Let your dog say hi to your boss. Crow about the TP you found at the store yesterday. Share a photo of the "cute" magic marker drawing your kid created on the wall.

Staying emotionally connected and empathizing with your coworkers can help you all feel stronger and well supported while you're alone in a crowd of remote workers.

2. Get Your Nature Fix

When your situation allows it, go outside and take a break. Seeing green spaces, breathing fresh air, and soaking up a little sunshine can boost your mood. I like to call it "nature nurture."

If you can't actually venture outside, then try viewing some uplifting nature videos or photos from the comfort of your desk or sofa.

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Because “spending time in nature can make us feel better both in mind and body,” researchers from BBC Earth and the University of California, Berkeley, sought to discover if watching nature could have the same effect.

After surveying thousands of people, the researchers determined that simply watching nature videos, like the [breathtaking examples](#) they shared from Planet Earth II, also can improve your outlook. If you watch the clips yourself, I think you'll agree that you don't have to immerse yourself in the great outdoors to enjoy the natural world.

According to the [research report](#), the study found “not only that watching content from Planet Earth II inspired significant increases in feelings of awe, contentedness, joy, amusement, and curiosity, but that it also acted to reduce feelings of tiredness, anger, and stress.” More joy...less stress. Goals!

3. Find Creative Ways to Exercise

Finding a way to work your muscles can help your mind take a break from mental gymnastics. Whether your workout is walking, running, biking, skating, or something else, getting outside to exercise can bring a double dose of relief.

If you can't exercise outside, for whatever reason, find a new workout video online. Or you can make up your own routine. When I had foot surgery and couldn't walk or run for exercise, I found chair cardio workouts. Who knew you could do seated jumping jacks?

Get creative, and you just might find an interesting alternative to your usual routine—like hula hooping. It's really hard not to smile when you're keeping that hula hoop going round and round.

4. Take Mindful Measures

Beyond exercise, practices that focus on mind-body-spirit connections can help alleviate tension and anxiety.

Yoga is one technique. If you haven't tried it, or even if you have, free videos abound on YouTube. Virtual yoga is going local too. Many neighborhood yoga studios are offering classes via live streaming during this time of social distancing.

Mindfulness training is another technique to consider. Consciously training your mind and body to accept your emotions in a calm way can help you deal with the multiple types of stress that sometimes come in waves during this crisis.

Clinical psychologist [Melanie Greenberg, PhD](#), notes that mindfulness involves developing a set of skills and an orientation toward life that bring an attitude of acceptance and openness to internal and external experiences. Slowing down and noticing your thoughts and physical sensations can help you tolerate the negative and appreciate the positive, she observes.

Meditation is another strategy for enhancing feelings of well-being. You can find meditation training online or using apps such as [Calm](#), [Headspace](#), or [Insight Timer](#), and many of the apps offer free trials. You can sample several options that way, and explore until you decide what works best for you.

5. Talk to a Professional or Friend

Even though many of us can't hang out with our friends right now or let off steam with coworkers after a long day, we can still talk to them. Lend an ear to an overworked colleague. Call up your worried besties. Video chat with your isolated parents.

And if the tension is beginning to boil over, seek professional advice. Telehealth is more available than ever, and many behavioral health counselors can provide support from near or far. If your organization has an employee assistance program, now is a good time to seek advice and referrals for professional assistance.

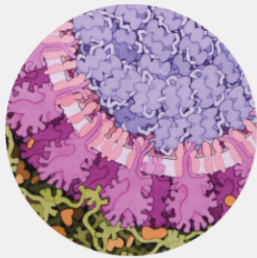
The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#) has tips for taking care of your behavioral health amid social distancing, quarantine, or isolation required by infectious disease outbreaks such as COVID-19. SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline is available by phone at 1-800-985-5990, or you can text TalkWithUs to 66746.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) also suggests the following ways to manage the stress and anxiety that might creep in during this crisis:

- Take breaks from the news about the pandemic.
- Take care of your body with healthy eating, exercise, good sleep, and more.
- Make time to relax and engage in activities you enjoy.
- Connect with people you trust who can lend an ear.

As you strive to stay healthy — physically and mentally — try some of these strategies to help you fight off your fears and the virus, and check out the [Relias COVID-19 toolkit](#). We all need to support one another as we balance the dual goals of wariness and wellness in these confusing times.

Interested in Learning More?



Understanding Coronavirus and How to Keep You and Yours Safe

For more information about the coronavirus and how to protect yourself, explore this webinar.

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