

## Maintaining Mental Wellness During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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COVID-19, or better termed as the coronavirus, has had a tremendous impact on the entire world by changing how people work, worship, and shop, just to name a few. Many have lost their lives as a result of this virus, and it still has an incredible hold on how we manage our day to day activities. The number of cases in the United States is steadily rising. It appears as though what many thought would be a flattening of the curve nearing the summer months has been quite the opposite, with cases spiking at a tremendous rate. There are several reasons as to why these numbers are steadily increasing versus declining such as: (1) many states have just been able to get the necessities to test people, (2) people have not had the proper personal equipment (PPE), (3) people fail to practice social distance, (4) people do not wear their protective masks, and (4) several people may have COVID-19, but they are asymptomatic and have possibly infected others without their knowledge. This list can go on, but I just wanted to highlight a few of the reasons as to why the number of COVID-19 cases are increasing versus decreasing.

Unfortunately, there is no magic wand we can wave to make COVID-19 disappear. COVID-19 has racked havoc in our lives on many levels. It is a virus you cannot see, but is so impactful to all those who encounter it. Research states that COVID-19 spreads through droplets in the air when a person who is infected sneezes or coughs. These droplets then travel in the air or make contact on various surfaces. Therefore, should a person come in contact with these droplets, he or she are more prone to becoming infected. Hence, this is why it is essentially critical for people to maintain proper social distancing among one another to aid in the preventing and spreading of this deadly disease.

The symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Fever or chills
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Muscle or body aches
- Sore throat

- Loss of taste or smell
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Nausea or vomiting.

Should you or anyone you know experience any of the above symptoms and think you might have COVID-19, please do not hesitate to contact your doctor's office, urgent care facility, emergency room or call 911. COVID-19 is extremely serious and is a deadly disease in which many have already lost their lives.

Moreover, in the midst of all that is going on with COVID-19, people are still having to maintain and take care of their daily lives. It is imperative that people function as normal as they can under these tremendous harsh conditions. Mental wellness, for many, has taken a backseat due to the stress of coping with COVID-19 and the incredible toll it has taken on everyone's lives.

**Below are some challenges COVID-19 has on mental wellness:**

- **Sleep irritability:** People's sleep patterns have been interrupted due to the stress of COVID-19.
- **Inadequate personal protection equipment (PPE):** Many people cannot afford to purchase a mask and/or gloves for each one of their family members.
- **Economic hardship-loss of employment or income:** The economy, as result of COVID-19, has been disrupted on many levels. Several businesses had to close for a few months and some were unable to re-open due to economic losses. This has resulted in people losing wages. Even though many businesses have reopened, it still is a strain on the economy. People are not in the position or are simply not willing to purchase items like they did in the past when both the economy and their employment were stable.
- **Insufficient wages, sick leave, and health care:** Due to the shelter in place orders, loss of employment, and social distancing requirements, people are not spending money on the economy like they were prior to COVID-19. Thus, the labor force has been reduced, impeding the number of hours workers are getting, subsequently, reducing one's work wages. In turn, this is impacting people's health care insurance, sick leave and vacation time at their places of employment.
- **Delayed proper medical treatment:** Health care providers, as well as patients, have agreed to wait on various medical situations if all possible in fear of contracting COVID-19. Additionally, many hospitals are currently inundated with an overflow of patients due to COVID-19.
- **Disproportionate death rates:** Countless people have lost their lives as a result of COVID-19. However, people are making their exit from what we call Earth, which has taken a tremendous toll on their loved ones. Several families have had to bury multiple loved ones at the same time, as well as only have graveside services due to not being able to gather in large groups and in enclosed spaces.
- **Anxiety:** People are feeling fearful and stressed over the unknown. Many are having anxious thoughts such as, "How long is this

virus going to last?" "Will I be next or a loved one?" There's a lot of uncertainty and unanswered questions causing people to feel tensed.

- **Depression:** Social isolation and not being able to function as you once knew your life to be can cause depression to creep into your life. With more time now and so many places closed, people can begin to experience feeling blue than they would on a normal basis.
- **Obsessive compulsive disorder:** People can begin overthinking, over-checking, and over-analyzing what they can and cannot do to maintain their safety and that of loved one.
- **Relationship Challenges:** People are having to adjust to spending more time in the same spaces, particularly husbands and wives. Prior to the virus, people were able to leave home and go to work. Now, they both are in the same spaces and may or may not have down time away from each other.
- **Parenting:** Parents are trying to figure out how to maintain their work schedule while having their children at home. Now that schools have had to shut down, children are at home all day with their parents/guardians or caregivers.
- **Adjusting to working from home:** Even though this seem like the ideal situation, there has been complications and kinks to work as employees from home, such as establishing a designated work space and making sure to implement work boundaries so as to not work all the time. There was also a huge learning curve with many employees now having to do everything online, where in the past they might have gotten assistance at work with those various tasks.
- **Social distancing (physical distancing):** The new normal is ensuring people are staying six feet away from each other. This aides in reducing the spread of the virus. Of course my motto is, "Stay six feet away or you will be six feet under".
- **Sheltering in Place:** The shelter in place orders were implemented to decrease the spread of the virus. People were asked to stay home for 30 days or longer unless it was essential they needed to leave their home. Only people who were consider essential workers were given permission to be mobile.
- **Moral injury:** Many people during the COVID-19 crisis have experienced, more than ever, guilty feelings and a sense of responsibility for the death of their loved ones or someone else. This is especially true for healthcare providers who are feeling they are having to make critical decisions regarding who gets to live due to the shortage of ventilators. Family members, on the other hand, are carrying the brunt of this burden because they are not able to care for their loved ones or be near them when they contract COVID-19.
- **Longer lines:** We live in a society where everything is done quickly and in a hurry. We have express lines to avoid the wait. However, COVID-19 has put a break in us getting in and out of places quickly. Therefore, people have to prepare themselves mentally to be patient during this time. Even though businesses have reopened, the goal is to limit the number of shoppers that are in the business at a given time to reduce the spread of the virus.

**Below are few suggestions on how to cope with COVID-19:**

- **Establish and maintain a routine:** Make sure when you get up each day you have something planned you would like to accomplish, no matter how big or small. This will keep you motivated and make you feel like have something to look forward to.

- **Keep something positive to read:** Feeding your mind something positive is healthy, because it helps to stimulate your mental and emotional growth.
- **Release those things in your life you have no control over:** Try not to sweat the small stuff. There are going to be some things you cannot control, like whether or not other people do what they need to do stay safe and keep others safe.
- **Be kind to yourself:** It easy to fall in to a rut during the pandemic and feel like you should be doing more. However, be kind to yourself because these are difficult times we are encountering. Please know you are not alone. Continue to do things that make you feel good about who you are as a person. For example, take a nice long bubble bath, sleep late one day, and be the first to forgive yourself if you make a mistake.
- **Be kind to others:** Think of ways you, yourself, family, church, or an organization you belong to could show kindness during this pandemic. For example, take food to the homeless shelter or to healthcare providers who are not able to leave to get something eat, or find out what necessities are needed for a local nursery home or your local police and firemen. Do something nice for someone or reach out to a friend you haven't been in touch with for a while. Of course, this list can be endless, so add to it or take away as you best see fit.
- **Stay connected:** During this time, we are not able to visit and have social gatherings like we have done in the past. It is especially incumbent on us that we stay connected with friends, family members, and loved ones. Many families who live far from each other are having weekly and monthly Zoom/Facetime meetings just to check in on each other.
- **Stay informed:** It is easy to feel overwhelmed and inundated with all the news about the pandemic that it might be tempting to shut things out. You do want to stay informed as to what is going on with the pandemic, but avoid overloading yourself with too much information.
- **Limit your social media intake:** Constantly being bombarded with the media can be emotionally exhausting, especially with all the things that are going on in the world in lieu of COVID-19. Thus, monitor your media intake so you do not become so saturated with the news that it paralyzes and disrupts your ability to not only function but think on positive things of the world.
- **Listen to music you find soothing to your soul:** Music is always a good way to relax your mind. Of course it needs to be music that soothes your soul.
- **Validate your emotions (Feelings Journal):** It is okay to check in with your feelings and be authentic with how you are feeling at that moment. You do not have wait on others to validate your emotions for you. You can keep a 'feelings journal,' where you simply write down what you are feeling and why you are feeling the way you do. This does not have be an activity you do daily, but only when you feel you need to express yourself.
- **Create a "I am grateful journal":** During these emotionally challenging times, it easy to forget that you have things to be grateful for, no matter how big or small they may be. Thus, being able to keep an 'I am grateful journal' is an honest way to say to yourself that in spite of how things might be looking, I still have things I can be grateful for. You can write at least 5 things down every day, whether in the morning or at night, just to reflect and have a sense of positivity in your life.
- **Take care of your own mental health:** Stay hydrated, make sure you get the proper amount of rest, and exercise if at all possible. This will allow you to remain positive and decrease any mental health consequences.

- **Consistently detox your thoughts by taking control over your negative self-talk:** Monitor your self-talk. When you notice that you are starting to speak negative about yourself, challenge yourself to find alternatives to those thoughts and justify the irrational thinking. For example, work on switching your statements from asking, “Is this true?” to “How is this helpful?”
- **Develop your own self-care kit:** Create your own self-care kit to motivate yourself to be the best version of you that you possibly can. Thus, make a list of those things and find your happy place so you can rely on those things to get through the pandemic. These things can include: shopping, reading, going for a walk, or anything that puts you as the focus.
- **Stay grounded morally and spiritually:** Many organized religion gatherings had to disband meeting together collectively. However, many are meeting online, so make sure you stay connected. Worship services can greatly impact your spiritual journey and outlook on life.

By no means is this an exhaustive list. Thus, I simply wanted to share with you techniques and strategies you can put into place as we go through this season of our lives, as we know it, while combatting COVID-19. This perhaps could be a new normal for a while until a vaccine is discovered. However, with any challenging time, it is indeed essential we maintain mental wellness. Being able to manage your mental wellness will allow you navigate through murky waters a lot easier. Of course I am in no way suggesting that everything will go away and fade in the background of life, but these are simply tools to put in tool kits which can give you a better advantage of being able to maintain positive mental wellness during COVID-19.

**Editorial Note:** Please be advised that information concerning the COVID-19 pandemic is constantly changing. Thus, please check the CDC’s website for the most current and up-to-date information.

### Disclosure

This article has not been published elsewhere, nor has it been submitted simultaneously for publication elsewhere. It does not constitute a conflict of interest for the author.

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