

How to Keep Your Mind Healthy and Active During the COVID-19 Crisis

Practicing self-care is especially important during this time.

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Tips for Keeping your Mind Healthy and Active in the Time of the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The coronavirus pandemic has brought sweeping changes to many of our daily routines and social interactions. It's important to remember that the emotions you feel during this time are normal, and it's OK to have them. It can also be valuable to work towards a plan, centered around self-care, that will allow you to address and manage your concerns.

Create a routine

One of the best things you can do is to establish a routine. While you may not currently be going into the office, it's still important to start each morning the same way. Make sure to set an alarm every night, and don't ignore it when it goes off. If you used to shower or work out before leaving for work, maintain that habit. Keeping a normal, consistent bedtime each night is just as significant.

Try utilizing daily "to-do" lists to ensure you have something to work towards, and don't be afraid to establish a weekday and weekend schedule. You shouldn't be constantly working even if your home is your new office. All of this will help you to adjust to your "new normal" and allow you to approach each day with a healthy, productive mindset.

Limit your news intake

While it's important to stay current on what is happening, it can become easy to get swept up in news about the coronavirus. Ask yourself: Do I really need this information, or am I just checking updates out of habit? Our brains are hardwired to notice when things appear dangerous and will activate an increase in our adrenaline and stress response. Our bodies can only handle this response for a limited time and exposing ourselves to chronic stressors is unhealthy.

If you find watching the news brings feelings of stress and anxiety, it's important to limit how often you're checking for updates, and instead refocus your energy on activities that will calm or recharge you (more on this later).

Use technology to your advantage

When used properly, technology can help you maintain a healthy and active mind. For instance, if you are under a shelter-at-home order, you can use your phone or computer to stay connected with family members, friends, and your community. Finding or maintaining a sense of community is a great way to address any feelings of loneliness or isolation.

While video conferencing is a nice way to stay in touch, it's also not the only way. Participating on message boards, making phone calls, or writing handwritten letters are all fantastic alternatives.

You can also use the internet to learn a new language, partake in a guided exercise or mediation session, learn a new skill, or even go on a virtual tour of a [museum](#) or [zoo](#). Scheduling a daily activity can help you maintain your routine and give you something to look forward to (or work towards) each day.

However, remember these activities are designed to help you unwind and recharge. If you find yourself being bombarded by stressors (such as COVID-19 updates), it's important to utilize another outlet.

Talk openly with your children

Those caring for children may face additional obstacles during this time. Make sure to speak to your children regularly and help them work through their fears and concerns. While it's never a good idea to reassure them blindly that everything will be OK, you can mention that things will get back to "normal" at some point, and the activities they love to do will come back again.

Now is a chance to focus on family time and create new traditions. You can have them help cook dinner once a week, designate a family game night, or pick a time to sit down and read a book together.

Organizing virtual play dates is also a great way for children to stay in contact with their friends and can give them something to look forward to if they are unable to leave the home.

Helpful ways to relax

If you're looking for helpful ways to relax, try one of the following activities. Remember, there is no wrong way to unwind and what works for one person might not for another.

- Go for a walk
- Exercise
- Meditate
- Participate in arts and crafts
- Connect virtually with a spiritual or religious community

- Journal
- Listen to music or podcasts
- Look through old photos
- Indulge in your sense of humor
- Play a family boardgame
- Read a book

Pay attention to self-care

Practicing self-care is important for everyone, especially in times of heightened stress and vulnerability. You can try one or more of the following:

- Practice increased hygiene, especially hand-washing with soap
- Limit your alcohol intake
- Do something creative
- Keep a journal of your thoughts and feelings
- Exercise regularly and pay attention to good nutrition
- Start a gratitude list: What is one thing you are grateful for today?

If you're a patient at Dana-Farber, make sure to explore the ongoing [virtual classes](#) offered by the Institute's [Leonard P. Zakim Center for Integrative Therapies and Healthy Living](#). The Zakim Center's diverse schedule ranges from yoga, to meditation with live music, and even weekly discussions regarding nutrition.

Another important aspect of self-care is reaching out to someone if you're feeling overwhelmed. Calling a friend can often help, but if you feel you need to speak with a professional, there are national hotlines you can contact and arrange to speak with a counselor over the phone.

If you're looking for someone to speak with, you can try using one of the following services:

- [Psychology Today](#): Connect with a therapist via the phone or video conferencing
- [Talk Space](#): A place to get virtual therapy
- [7 Cups](#): Free emotional support
- [Samaritan Suicide Hotline](#): Offering 24/7 confidential and free support from a trained volunteer call or text 1-877-870-4673

Additional resources

Here's a list of additional resources that may be helpful:

- [Stress and Coping \(CDC\)](#)
- [This Is a Good Time to Stop Fighting Anxiety \(New York Times\)](#)
- [VirusAnxiety.com](#)
- [Headspace](#)

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