



A message to our Tri-State Family

Managing anxiety and stress as a health care worker.

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For health workers, feeling under pressure is a likely reality for you and many of your colleagues. It is normal to be feeling this way in the current situation. Stress and the feelings associated with it are by no means a reflection that you cannot do your job, or that you are weak. Managing your mental health and psychosocial wellbeing during this time is as important as managing your physical health. Stress prevention and management are critical for responders to stay well and to continue to help in the situation.

Now is the time to practice good self-care!

Take care of yourself at this time. Try and use helpful coping strategies such as:

- Ensuring sufficient rest and respite during work or between shifts
- Eat adequate and healthy food
- Engage in physical activity, exercise releases tension, and clears the mind (try a solo dance party)!
- Stay in contact with family and friends (whatever digital methods work for you).
- Avoid using unhelpful coping strategies such as tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs. In the long term, these can worsen your mental and physical wellbeing.
- Create a menu of personal self-care activities that you enjoy. Some ideas include taking a bath, reading a book, watching funny cat videos, taking a nature walk, listening to music, etc.
- Work in teams and limit the amount of time working alone.
- Write in a journal; write down what makes you feel grateful.
- Practice breathing and relaxation techniques.
- Remind yourself – “It is not selfish to take breaks.”

- Try something new - learn a new craft, make a new recipe, and do something creative.
- Laugh! It is so good for the soul! “We don’t laugh because we are happy. ***We’re happy because we laugh.***” ~ ***William James***



Many workers are in an unprecedented scenario. Even so, continue using strategies that have worked for you in the past to help manage stress and anxiety. You are most likely to know how to de-stress and you should not be hesitant in keeping yourself psychologically well. ***This is not a sprint; it's a marathon.***

Some healthcare workers may, unfortunately, experience avoidance by their family or community due to stigma or fear. This can make an already challenging situation far more difficult. If possible, staying connected with your loved ones including through digital methods, is one way to maintain contact.

Turn to your colleagues, your manager, or other trusted persons for social support - your colleagues may be having similar experiences to you. ***Take a break from media coverage of COVID-19; stick with a trusted source for your information.***

Resources:

There are several great **podcasts** to support health care workers as we navigate this pandemic. Put on your headphones and sit back. Check these out:

- <https://www.tenpercent.com/coronavirussanityguide> (Ten Percent Happier Podcast)
- Harris – Podcast, with inspirations and meditations especially tailored for health care workers/providers
- <https://brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-on-ffts/> (Unlocking Us Podcast – Brene Brown)
- Brown has started a podcast, and her first episode is learning how to handle “first times”, in the face of the Coronavirus.

Phone Apps:

There are many phone apps to aid with reducing anxiety and stress, and improve your practice of coping, relaxation, and mindfulness to improve your mental health. Check these out – find one that works for you, and install it on your phone!

*** Free apps with the option to upgrade for a fee**

The Mindfulness App

Mindshift

Calm*

Daylio*

Pacifica

Buddhify

Sattva

Headspace

Smiling mind

Stop, Breathe, Think

YOGA: mindbodygreen.com

My3

PTSD Coach* (VA sponsored)

Some of you may already have “your favorites,” so please share with your co-workers!

Resources for Gym Closures:

Exercise is so crucial for our mental health; exercise helps work out tension, improves our sleep, helps clear the mind, and improves our mood! Since there are gym closures, there are plenty of YouTube videos, from Yoga to Barre to Cardio, and everything in between to keep you moving and groovin'! Check out:

- PopSugar
Fitness, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBINFWq52ShSqUFEoynfSwg>Yoga:
<https://www.youtube.com/user/yogawithadriene>
- family yoga: <https://www.gonoodle.com/for-families/>

Grounding:

Grounding is a technique that helps us reorient to the here-and-now, to bring us into the present. This is a useful technique if you ever feel overwhelmed, intensely anxious, or dissociated from your environment. The “54321 game” is a common sensory awareness grounding exercise that many find a helpful tool to relax or get through difficult moments.

Procedure:

1. Describe 5 things you see in the room
2. Name 4 things you can feel (“my feet on the floor” or “the air in my nose”)
3. Name 3 things you hear right now (“traffic outside”)
4. Name 2 things you can smell right now (or 2 smells you like)
5. Name 1 good thing about yourself

You should feel calmer and more at ease by the end of the exercise. Repeat the five steps more than once if needed. Try out the technique in different situations; you may find it works well for insomnia, anxiety, cravings when quitting smoking, or for general relaxation. Oh, and kids like to do this too!

Ask for help if you feel overwhelmed or concerned that COVID-19 is affecting your ability to care for your family and patients as you did before the outbreak.

This article will be accessible on the Tri-State Employee Blog.

