

Maintaining Your Emotional Immunity During Covid-19

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Uncertainty is one of our most difficult feelings to manage. We humans, like to wrap our minds around things, we like to know what's going to happen. But do we? Hmmm that's the age-old question. It is times like these that pull us into the present, that remind us of who we love and what we have.

It's not what happens to us, but what we do with what happens that matters. Research on resilience finds that those who thrive in situations that might defeat others, have somehow figured out how to mobilize their supports and make use of them. They have a sense of reality and acceptance about their circumstances, but they are proactive in taking steps to make things better. Here are some tips that will help you to manage anxiety and actively create some balance and calm throughout this challenging period.

- **Take it a day at a time. Don't panic.** Try seeing anxiety as a contagious virus of its own that can undermine your emotional health and the health of the systems that you're operating in. Take responsibility for your own state of calm.
- **Make a plan for the day.** Organizing your time will give you a greater sense of control and will reassure you and all concerned that much of life can still feel normal.
- **Maintain family, couple, and personal rituals.** Rituals provide a sense of stability, whether they are coffee in the am, morning meditation, sitting down for lunch, nap, family time, you name it. Even choosing a movie to watch together, making popcorn and cuddling up on the couch can be a reassuring family ritual that brings relaxation, pleasure, and calm to everyone.
- **Maintain your environment.** Keep things orderly in your personal world. It counters the feeling of



helplessness to take charge of your environment. Do things that give you a sense of agency and control. Clean a cupboard.

- **Eat a healthy diet.** I cannot stress this enough. If you eat foods that are “empty calories” or do not give you the healthy fuel that you need to feel good or bog down your system trying to digest what shouldn't be in it in the first place, your emotional immunity will suffer. Be aware that alcohol lowers physical immunity very significantly. Find alternative ways of relaxing.
- **Breathe.** Remember to do rhythmic, diaphragmatic breathing. It will calm your nervous system and increase your sense of well-being. Take extra downtime, stress and uncertainty can be tiring, make sure that you relax when you can and find healthy ways of unwinding.
- **Exercise.** Exercise is always important, but as a way of managing stress, depression, or anxiety, it is a must. The natural serotonin that your body releases through exercise is one of nature's most important

mood stabilizers. According to research, a brisk walk is as effective at managing depression as medication! To say nothing of the obvious perks of being more fit and feeling great!

- **Stay Positive.** Watch your narrative. If you have a doom and gloom narrative try changing it to a “we’ll all be fine if we pull together and keep our heads straight” one. This one is crucial; your attitude is up to you. No one can adopt a positive attitude for you, and you owe it to yourself and to those close to you to stay positive.
- **Don’t isolate.** We have the blessing of technology. Keep in touch with the people in your life who matter to you. Social isolation is only physical, and you do not need to isolate yourself from family and friends, thanks to technology.
- **Embrace the extra time you have as a result of social distancing.** If you are spending more time with your family, make the most of it. Families that learn how to cope and get through things by pulling together are stronger for it. These experiences can be very bonding if you keep your heads and hearts in the right place.
- **Limit the time you talk about the virus.** (My daughter suggested this and finds that adopting this with her husband and family helps them to stay positive). If you are caring for kids or a couple, talk about the virus when you need to, but don’t let it take command of your entire day. Don’t stare at the news channel all day, keep up on what you need to know then break away and do normal things.
- **Follow all safety recommendations from the CDC.** You do not need to figure this out, you just need to do your best with the information that’s out there. Follow the recommendations of the experts you deem sensible and capable.
- **Don’t collapse.** Our thinking mind tends to go offline when we’re emotionally overwhelmed or panicking. It’s part of the fight/flight trauma response. Creating a schedule, putting things on paper, engaging in a project, organizing a meal, or a family activity are all ways of bringing our thinking mind back on board again.
- **Stay out of fight/flight/freeze.** When we get scared or overwhelmed, our animal DNA tells us to run (*or run mentally/dissociate*), to fight (*criticize, yell,*

get aggressive and me-first), or to freeze (*shut down, withdraw*).

- **Do a spiritual reset.** Instead of getting lost in the feeling of uncertainty, reflect on the idea that all we really know about is today. Challenge yourself to appreciate the moment more fully. Stay in the present!
- **Reassure those you love that you’re doing well by taking the steps to take care of yourself.** If you are in a high-risk group, try not to be an extra burden for those who love you. If you’re an older adult, act with steadiness and maturity.

And keep the big picture in mind. The Italians who hung out the window during lockdown and sang together have seen much worse than this in their communities. They learned that pulling together rather than pulling apart gave them the spiritual nourishment to get through. You may not live close enough to your neighbors to harmonize down the block, but singing will still do your heart good, look for the silver linings, they are always there.



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