

Helpful Ideas for Coping with the Pandemic

Dr. Beau A. Nelson, FHE Health Chief Clinical Officer

There is no one thing we can do to make this all better. We have to take it one day at a time. In the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic, there are going to be many things that we face, and we may not know what to do with it. Many in our community take the brunt of this as we try and deal with the new order of working stressful jobs, navigating home responsibilities, and dealing with the overall anxiety a time like this can create.

In this time, it is important to be compassionate towards yourself and others and to take care of yourself as best as you can, there is no right or wrong when it comes to emotional responses. You feel what you feel. Those feelings are guides to let you know what you need to do support yourself, your family, and your particular situation. Feeling like the world is upside down, is okay, because for almost all of us, that's exactly what is happening.

As we take care of ourselves and those we care about, good gestures and taking care of our emotional needs goes a long way in helping us get through this. Below are some tips for each of us:

Take care of Your Physical Body – Exercise, Sleep, and Eat Well

This means taking care of the basics (as you can control it). Try to exercise each day to reduce stress and get some alone time, it doesn't have to be a lot, it could be 15 minutes of a brisk walk, the rule is "anything is better than nothing."

Get yourself in a healthy sleep routine (again, as best as you can). Sleep is most restorative when we have a set time to go to sleep and wake up each day (yes, all seven days). Your body may require more sleep when you are very stressed, but as a rule look at 8 hours of sleep and try and have that regular routine, your body will like that.

Avoid drinking alcohol or using drugs to cope, this negatively impacts your immune system and causes stress on the body. Look at what you eat during the day and be as healthy as you can. This not only helps your waistline, but it also helps your bodies to get the nutrients it needs when you are out of sorts. A variety of proteins, vegetables, fruits, and lots of water are really good.

Take care of your Emotional Health – Don't Forget About You

This can be tough. Remember little things make a difference. You cannot burn the candle at both ends and avoid getting burned. This is not easy, but it makes a difference. Try the following:

- Take a break after work before staring on your home responsibilities. Can be a few minutes to deep breathe, walk around, sit in your car and cry, its ok to feel scared and down. Give yourself a few minutes at least to close one part of your day and start another.
- Don't keep it inside – talk to someone. A few minutes with a confidant, co-worker, friend, or therapist can make a world of difference. While we may be physically distancing, we need to be engaged with social supports more than ever. Make a point to reach out to someone and talk, we are all going through this, and getting through it together is better than going it alone.
- Connect with your spiritual side, nature, or good practices. If you love Yoga, do it; if you find quiet meditation helpful, practice it; if you need to pray or talk to a spiritual contact, reach out. Whatever builds you up, make time for it. A few minutes a day, or when you can sneak it in, will help you. There is no way to make this all better or make it make sense, but if something helps you when you have been in tough spots before, give it some time now.

Helpful Ideas for Coping with the Pandemic (continued)

Be Compassionate with Others

Kids, spouses, co-workers, family, whoever it is, be compassionate and slow to react or get angry. We are all struggling. Don't make a bad situation worse. If you need to, walk away for a minute, do it. Do not react and get angry, it is not good for you and it rarely solves anything. Getting angry is negative for your relationships, your physical health, and your self-care. Let go of it as much as you can. If you are scared, talk about it; if you are overwhelmed, ask for help or at least take a break for minute; if you are able to help another, do it. You can ask for help, you can talk about dealing with it, you can do what you can, and then it keeps going. Little kindnesses make a huge difference. Helping others helps ourselves. As you can, use your words, energy, and minutes, to help the situation for yourself and others. It may not be easy, you may be stretched to more than you think you can handle, but this will pass, and you will get through it. It's not easy, but it is possible. How you get through it is your call, doing it may be tough, but it is worth everything you can give it.

Physical vs. Social Distancing – A safety mechanism to decrease the exposure risks to COVID-19

Given the ease of contamination of uninfected people with this virus, it is critical that we maintain at least six feet of separation between people, wear facemasks when outside our homes, and wash our hands thoroughly and frequently. These practices are "physical distancing" and should not be termed "social" distancing. In times of major crisis, we need more social support rather than distancing and withdrawal. We need to reach out to our loved ones, friends, fellow workers, and neighbors. People actually have a greater need for human interaction and support as we fight the current pandemic as a community of caring humans. While practicing physical distancing let us increase contact with others via the marvels of technology. Use our phones, texting, email, Zoom, FaceTime, and other techniques to show others we care for them and are here to support and help them.

Getting through uncertain times depends on you being able to be aware of what you need and then responding to it in a healthy way. There are a lot more changes we will experience, but what we do with them is key. Remember, we are not trying to reach perfection. We can practice healthy choices, even small ones, and by doing this, make our situations better. A few minutes of exercise a day, going to bed earlier and getting a good night's sleep, doing something relaxing, even in small quantities helps your body and soul. Take care of yourself and those around you, we are in this together, and if you need support or help – just ask! We may be out of our regular routines and social contacts, but we are all in this together, get the support you need and begin by making small steps for your physical and mental health!

For more information on FHE Health, please contact
Janet B. Gerhard
Director of Public Affairs
FHE Health
Direct 267-249-0513