

## Strategies for Managing Stress and Building Resilience

### Anxiety is “Normal”

As a healthcare professional, it is “normal” to experience stress and anxiety during a health crisis. Feeling that you are not in control can create intense anxiety and consequently negatively impact your ability to function. Although these feelings are common, it is important to address these symptoms to minimize their impact on your health.

### Grounding exercises

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Ground exercises and relaxation exercises help to distract you from negative or unhelpful thoughts and bring you attention back to the present moment. Some helpful grounding techniques to use include:

- **Mantra:** A mantra is something you tell yourself every couple hours to help ground yourself. For example, “everything will be okay”, “I have the skills to handle this challenge”, “I can’t control the other people’s actions but I can take care of myself”. Place sticky notes on your mirrors or use your phone to remind you during breaks and before and after your shift.
- **5-4-3-2-1 method:** use your senses to focus on your environment. 5 things you see, 4 things you feel, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, one thing you taste.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation:** following an audio recording or on your own, focus on breathing in and tensing muscle group for 4-10 seconds then breathing out while relaxing the muscle group for 10-20 seconds. Work through your muscle groups in whatever pattern works best (for example-head to toe)

### Meditation

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You can use meditation apps such as Calm, Headspace, or Insight Timer. Headspace has a free section called “Weathering the Storm” specifically designed for COVID-19 anxiety. YouTube also has many options for guided meditations.

### Movement

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Your body stores anxiety and primary trauma/secondary trauma. Many people find different forms of movement to be helpful in reducing or managing anxiety. When moving, pay attention to your senses-how your body feels against the ground, the sound of nature outside. Some people find Yoga, hiking, slow walks, or programmed workouts to be very helpful. There are many apps you can use if you need help creating an exercise routine.

### Monitor your intake

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When stressed, it can be easy to lean more heavily on substances to cope. Try to reduce your caffeine intake and be cognizant of how much alcohol or cannabis you consume. Setting limits for yourself and sticking to them can be a good way to ensure you are over-consuming due to stress. Equally important is what you are eating. Try and bring food to work and ensure you have food at home. Many grocery stores are offering free online pick up or delivery options.

### Stay Connected

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Find ways to remain connected to your support system. Use technology such as Skype, Facetime or phone calls. Schedule time to connect with family members and friends on a regular basis.

Take breaks from Social Media

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Create a schedule to ensure you are not consuming more media than is helpful. If you struggle to limit media, consider using a timer.

## Apps, tools, and websites to share

**Breathe2Relax:** Smartphone app with instructions and exercises in 'diaphragmatic breathing,' a well-researched stress management skill.

**Pacifica:** Provides guided deep breathing and muscle relaxation exercises, daily antianxiety experiments, and tools including a mood tracker. Recording your own thoughts can help you understand your thinking patterns and recognize possible anxiety triggers.

**GPS for the Soul:** Created by Arianna Huffington and Deepak Chopra. Uses biofeedback to help you determine your level of stress, and helps you manage stress with meditation tools that include calming pictures and music.

**Happify:** A brain-training app based on research showing that some types of activity can help you combat negativity, anxiety, and stress while fostering gratitude and empathy.

**Calm:** With the mission to make the world healthier and happier, this app provides simple instruction in meditation and mindfulness. They offer programs focused on different topics, including reducing anxiety, improving sleep, increasing relaxation, and much more. A free trial is available with additional sessions available by subscription.

**Headspace:** "A gym membership for the mind." It provides a series of guided meditation sessions and mindfulness training. A free trial is available.

**Personal Zen:** Developed with a professor of psychology and neuroscience, a series of games based on clinical findings about methods for reducing anxiety levels.

**My Mood Tracker:** Knowledge is power. Once you become more aware of what you're feeling when, you can begin figuring out links between life events and cycles and your moods, which in turn will help you manage (and work around) your moods.

**Squeeze and Shake:** A fun app to let you take out frustrations on a digital rubber duck.

**Pay It Forward:** Encourages a daily act of kindness - a proven stress reducer - with a list of suggestions as well as connection to a community of people who are committed to the principles of paying it forward.

**VirusAnxiety.com:** This website is exactly what it sounds like and offers various free resources.

