

## COVID-19 and Your Mental Health

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COVID-19 has slammed its way into the public awareness over the past week or so and doesn't look as though it is going to slow down, at least in the short term. With large amounts of uncertainty facing us, it naturally has tested individuals, organizations and the larger global community. There are real concerns and considerations that you and your family can contemplate to not only weather the storm from work, but also to keep yourself (mind, body, spirit) intact throughout.

We want to try and address a few things that have come to our attention from the community and also just some good overall nervous system healthcare you can do to help yourself and support those around you.

First, although this may seem like “feel good” psychology, self-care is a darn thing! Do it. Right. Now. Take a few deep breaths, give yourself 5 minutes, take a little nap, stretch, eat well, take vitamins, meditate. Whatever it is that helps your nervous system SLOW DOWN in times of increased pressure and uncertainty- those are the things to do. We aren't talking new hobbies, although that maybe is an idea too, but short term on demand self-care is about getting your nervous system to settle. Now, why isn't this just feel good psych suggestions? Because of what happens when your nervous system doesn't get a chance to settle- parts of your brain stop talking to each other and the strains start impacting immune response. Even the best triage minds hit a wall at some point. To help circumvent that and support your systems' long term and short-term health, these small actions of kindness and care towards yourself when under increased demand can make **all the difference**. So, go and DO SOME. It matters...really it does. **This suggestion can support your overall nervous system health and function.**

Second, and perhaps a bit more complex, is to find what you can control. WHAT!? A psychologist said that?! Yep. When we are in a triage mind state facing uncertainty, the brain gets really taxed and quick. Finding things that you feel in control of will help immensely because it helps the system feel a little safer. Things like, if you want a turkey sandwich make sure you eat that, if you like to exercise daily make sure you do that too. How about walking your dog first thing when you get home or listening to the same favorite song on your way to work? Yup, those count too. This is about control over activities, smaller things and even those self-care ideas we just talked about. But let us be clear, this type of control is not to be wielded over others in your life as that would not be the way to apply this and won't turn out the way you want either. Think smaller- think external- break down things into pieces and find those harmless but important things you can count on. **This suggestion can support your nervous system to not go into autonomic sympathetic flight mode.**

Third, to go along with control is its important counterpart, choice. Oh yes choice! This is not unlike the rationale of finding smaller things in life to feel in control of, as choice offers us options and the brain LOVES that. Not every idea we think or feel about leads to an action, right? Same is true with our proposal here. Think about what types of choices you have. Even if they are small, even if they aren't things you would normally think of or normally do. Letting yourself have the ideas come forth and acknowledging them can be just enough to help your nervous system settle and continue forth with an integrated brain and a nervous system that is flowing downstream. These choices can also be things that you ultimately decide to pursue, but either way, some added mindfulness about what choices you have available can help support yourself now and always. **This suggestion can support your nervous system to not go into autonomic sympathetic fight mode.**

Fourth, and for some may pose a challenge (but we call you to try), SLEEP. Sleep. Sleep. And just to make a point, here is the word again, sleep. You need to get some sleep! Try to not nap too often, but if you can get it, take it in the short term. Longer periods of sleep are the best for repair versus small sips of an hour here or an hour there. Sleep is such an essential and necessary component to the rest of all the systems but especially the two that are going to be and are under the most stress: the immune system and nervous system. Without being able to recharge and disconnect through this critical biologic requirement the brain can't do its nightly filing away of the day and the rest of the body can't be "cleaned" up by the immune system. Thus, a good night's rest of 7-8 hours (maybe wishful thinking but again, here is for hoping) gives your immune system the time to do its job (first 4 hours or so are for body repair) and then the brain can sort the day (second 4 hours are for the brain). Thus, letting yourself rest is one of the best things you can do when stress is mounting. **This suggestion can support your overall immune/nervous system health and function.**

Fifth, and although perhaps obvious, stay connected in ways that feel good and talk to the important people in your life. Times of uncertainty warn a greater need for openness and vulnerability. Have those conversations with your loved ones, make decisions together and try and work as a team. Times that are scary or overwhelming can also be times where deeper bonding and communication can grow. Don't be afraid to share that you feel scared, worried, overwhelmed, exhausted, angry, etc. All of those emotions are of value and are worthwhile to share. If not shared, they can create more fatigue and angst which obviously is not needed for you or for anyone else. Share those feelings my friends. While social distancing is important for the control of a novel virus; it is not emotional distancing. Reach out to others via phone and/or video conference (no text) to stay connected and supported. We are all wrestling with the unknown right now. **This suggestion can support your overall immune/nervous system health and function.**

Lastly, but not leastly, try and help your physiology process when you can. Here is even an "exercise" you can try to help that occur. Pick a position whether sitting, standing, kneeling, laying down, etc. and whatever parts of your body that touches an external surface I want you to start to notice whatever that external surface is and how it feels underneath your body. Take a few deep breaths while doing this and just notice your system start to settle. Sometimes your system may speed up, sometimes it will slow down; don't worry that you are doing it wrong. Whatever you start to feel your job is to just continue to notice. When your system does settle a little bit, notice where your attention is drawn inside your body. If it is towards your limbs, start to open and close you hands very slowly or wiggle your toes in your boots. We know it sounds weird but these actions help the nervous system move energy out (that could turn into anxiety or anger if not moved through/discharged) and it also reminds the body of where it is presently. If you notice that your attention was drawn into your core instead of your limbs, consider what that feeling inside wants/needs/wants you to know and acknowledge/listen/validate it. We know, sounds like psychobabble, but it rather is a form of neuroception (stimulating and controlling your own nervous system response). In doing this acknowledgement you too are helping your system move some energy out (that could also turn into anxiety or anger if not moved through/discharged). These practices allow for greater mind/body awareness and support your nervous system's ability to return to its best state - homeostasis. **This suggestion can support your overall immune/nervous system health and function.**

As we will continue to scramble to make sense of what to do and how to do it over the next weeks or months, remember this is a marathon, not a sprint. Take care of yourself (you are worth it), love your family and do your best. We will come through this together. Thank you for your service and deep sacrifice.

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Chief James P. Moore

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