



GUIDELINES FOR STRESS AND ANXIETY MANAGEMENT DURING COVID-19

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**Recommendations and resources for taking care
of yourself and your loved ones during these hard times.....**

BACKGROUND:

Life changes very quickly, in a POSITIVE way, if you let it!

(Lindsay Vonn)

In times of uncertainty like this global health crisis, with lots of questions, little knowledge and few answers, the anxiety and stress which people are experiencing in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic is normal. Approaching this time with positive thoughts and emotions can lead to happiness. The key to building healthier communities starts with building positivity and resilience. Supporting and connecting with the people around us is a crucial step towards managing the stress and anxiety associated with difficult times.

Since the first cases of the novel coronavirus disease, COVID-19, appeared in Pakistan, the government has introduced unprecedented measures, including closing businesses, lockdowns at various levels, social distancing and the concept of self-isolation of suspected and confirmed cases of Covid-19. For many of us, the impact of the virus will affect both our physical health and mental well-being. Our major concerns revolve around family health, jobs, expenditures, dealing with isolation, and distinguishing fact from fiction in news reports about COVID-19.

Different research studies ⁽¹⁻⁶⁾ show an increasing number of people have reported feelings of anxiety and fear. Since stress is associated with a depressed immune response, thereby increasing risk of disease, finding peace and calm within the storm has never been more important than today. The impact is likely to be felt by the general public, those who get sick with COVID-19, their families and friends, healthcare workers, and persons with pre-existing mental health conditions, the young and the elderly alike.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this document is to provide some guidelines and resources to enable individuals to cope with stress in a healthy way, making themselves, the people they care about, and the community stronger.

These guidelines are meant as an additional support —not to replace—any state or local health and safety laws, rules, and regulations.

FOCUS GROUPS:

The document will address 3 major categories of people: health care workers, the general public and relatives of COVID-19 positive patients.

Guidelines for Health Care Workers:

1. Group therapy/ counselling sessions will enable health care workers to deal with both physical and emotional stress associated with management of COVID-19 patients. Empathy from colleagues or a designated therapist will reduce their personal anxiety and fear.
2. Create a positive work culture with teamwork and give confidence to colleagues and staff regarding sharing of issues related to the laboratory, or their personal lives, which could have an adverse impact on themselves and their work environment.
3. Continuous training and education regarding use of PPE, waste disposal, emergency responses, working in biosafety cabinets, shipping of infectious material, will ensure confidence building during handling of COVID-19 patients. Empower people to take care of themselves. They can do it!
4. Ensure intake of a healthy, nourishing diet, with adequate amounts of water, fruit, vegetables and proteins to maintain physical health.
5. Promote stress-reducing activities:
 - a. Allocate time for physical exercise daily to reduce stress levels and improve general well-being.
 - b. Read books you enjoy, start a new hobby/craft which you have never had time for, cook, listen to music..... do anything which relaxes you.
 - c. Organize yourself: make a planner for your tasks to avoid the chaos of stress.
 - d. Meditate, go for a walk, pray
6. Stay informed—but do not obsessively check the news. Check trustworthy sources such as the CDC, the World Health Organization, and your local public health authorities for updates and information.
7. Protect and promote public health services around you to develop a healthy lifestyle, projecting a positive attitude and preventing and responding to infectious disease.
8. Keep calm about what you are doing; feel great about what you have done. The reflection process can help boost your self-esteem and ease anxiety by emphasizing your positive achievements.

<https://youtu.be/pyoRIVHF7Oo> (Video on building resiliency: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for COVID-19)

Guidelines for the General Public:

1. Be positive and grateful for everything you have. If you feel overwhelmed and anxious about any situation, write about it, focusing your thoughts on what is positive in your life. Meditate, pray.

2. Limit how often you check for updates and your media exposure time. Stop watching the news if you start feeling overwhelmed.
3. Take things one at a time. Multi-tasking is linked to increased production of stress hormones that can send your body into panic mode.
4. Laughter is the best medicine. Enjoy activities which make you laugh. Watch a funny movie; read a good book.
5. Organize your daily tasks to avoid procrastination. Give yourself realistic deadlines and work your way down the list. It helps you to keep motivated and stress free.
6. Keep yourself busy in healthy, productive activities do what you love...baking, listening to music, enjoying sounds of nature around you, cleaning your closet.... whatever makes you relax.
7. Connect with people around you while maintaining social distancing. Email a card to a friend, call a relative you have missed seeing or do a video chat / get together with friends.
8. Take some time to practice self-love; whether that means starting the day repeating positive affirmations about yourself or nourishing your body with the nutrition you need.
9. Try “out of the box activities”: treat yourself to herbal tea; light a scented candle; start an online class; listen to music; watch your favorite program; read a book; go and sit in the open and enjoy nature; tell you children stories about your childhood; write a notebook; draw.... things which you want to do which give you happiness and mental relaxation.
10. Ask for help from a colleague, a trusted friend, family member or a professional if you feel you are unable to cope. Everyone needs a helping hand sometimes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9Eys4gDfPO>

_(Video on building resiliency: Ideas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTSJvBZd820>

for Children and Parents at Home During COVID-19

(Video on building resiliency: Proper

Home Isolation Tips for COVID-19

Guidelines for Relatives of COVID-19 Positive Patients:

1. Demonstrate empathy for your loved ones by telling them what it means to test positive and negative for the disease; explain how long to be in quarantine, and how quarantining is beneficial for them and for their loved ones.
2. Communicate with them and ask what they think about this pandemic and how they want to deal with it. Make them feel that their opinion is important.

3. Talk to health care workers to improve your understanding of the disease, how to care for the patient, how to minimize risk to yourself and those around the patient.
4. Limit your time on social media. Constant monitoring of news and media becomes compulsive and counterproductive, fueling anxiety rather than easing it.
5. Focus on things you can control like handwashing; avoid touching your (particularly your eyes, nose, and mouth); get plenty of sleep; exercise: eat a nourishing diet; all of these helps support your immune system.
6. Write down specific worries you have about how coronavirus may disrupt your life. Address them with the help of friends, or family or through professional help.
7. Stay connected—even when physically isolated. Make it a priority to stay in touch with friends and family..... schedule regular phone calls, chats, or Zoom dates.
8. Take time out for activities you enjoy. Read a good book, watch a comedy, play a game, make something—whether it is a new recipe, a craft, or a piece of art. It does not matter what you do, as long as it gives you calm and peace.
9. With children around, you need to sit down and explain to them the importance of measures being taken. Tell them you know they are feeling anxious about catching coronavirus, but part of why they have been asked to do — to wash their faces, to stay close to their home — is to ensure we take care of members of our household and community.
10. Focus on positivity. Rather than drowning in worries that you will get the coronavirus, your job situation, or that your kids will not be able to return to school, focus on what you have achieved in life, what you have been able to do despite adversity, and be grateful.
11. Maintain your everyday activities as close to normal as possible under the circumstances... getting up at the usual time and focusing on your routine.
12. Acknowledge your feelings. Whatever you are feeling right now, know that it is okay to feel that way. Pray, meditate.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-2Wbu1I-50> (Video on building resiliency: Taking Care of Yourself During a Crisis)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCMIL7sJZ3A> (Video on building resiliency: Controlling Fear and Outrage)

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