

Handling stress during the COVID-19 outbreak



Tips from the Office of Well-being

Safeguarding the wellbeing of our staff is an important part of our preparations for the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are some fast, practical ways to manage stress and anxiety as we rise to the challenge of caring for our state.

Stay active

Physical activity can help your body manage stress.

- Talk a short walk. Concentrate on your steps. Notice the rhythm of your footsteps and how it feels to put your foot on the ground and then lift it again.
- Stretch. Extend your fingers, arms, legs as far as you can; slowly and gently roll your head around.
- Walk or run up and down the stairs two or three times. If you're new to taking the stairs, start slowly and build up to more flights up overtime.
- Dance it out. Find a place where you can play music and move your body. You don't have to be a "good dancer", just get moving to the beat.

Focus on the present

Bringing your attention to the present moment can give your mind a break from stressful thoughts.

- Try the "Feet on the Floor" ground exercise with Diana Tikasz from TEND Academy: <https://www.tendacademy.ca/feet-on-the-floor/>
- Use the 5-4-3-2-1 method

Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Open your eyes and name out loud:

- Five things you can see (within the room and out of the window)
- Four things you can feel (the texture of your clothes or temperature of the room, for example)
- Three things you can hear (traffic noise, birds outside, or other sounds you might not usually notice).
- Two things you can smell right now
- One thing you can taste (it might be a good idea to keep a piece of chocolate or candy on hand for this. Take a small bite and savor the flavor for a few seconds).

Take a deep breath to end.

- Think in categories
Choose a category, such as musical instruments, ice cream flavors, mammals, or baseball teams. Take a minute or two to mentally list as many things from each category as you can.
- Have a coping mantra
Choose a simple, positive phrase, such as I can do this, I am strong, or this feeling will pass and quietly repeat it to yourself. You don't have to stop and find a special place to do this. As you walk, slowly repeat your mantra in time with your steps. If you have to move quickly, say your mantra as slowly as you can in your mind or whisper it slowly under your breath. You can also combine deep breathing with your mantra. For example, inhale slowly saying "I can", exhale slowly, saying "do this" three times. Pause at the end of each breath.

- Use the 4-7-8 breathing technique

Focus on the following breathing pattern:

- empty your lungs of air
- breathe in quietly through your nose for four seconds
- hold your breath for a count of seven seconds
- exhale forcefully through your mouth, pursing your lips and making a “whoosh” sound, for eight seconds
- repeat the cycle up to four times

This can make you dizzy when you first start out so plan to do this at home before you go to bed. It will help quiet the mind and relax your body for sleep.

- Visit the quiet room across from the UMMC Chapel. The room is located on the first floor of the hospital, next to the Hospital Administration suite. You'll see a hallway that leads to the room, and the door will be on your left. Sit down wherever seems comfortable. Plant both feet on the ground, feel your feet on the floor, stable and strong. Take a minute to hear and feel the silence. Take three deep breaths. Focus on pushing your belly out as you breathe to get push the oxygen down in your lungs.

Practice gratitude

Being aware of the good things in your life can help you handles the bad things.

- Three Good Things exercise by Dr. Martin Seligman.

Every night, just before bed, sit down for a few minutes and look back at your day. Think of three good things that happened during the day. Write them down.

This happiness-boosting exercise might seem too simple, but “Three Good Things” has been found to be extremely powerful in increasing your daily levels of happiness. “takes just around 3 minutes of your day.”

Breathing Exercise Apps

Breathe by Dr. Jud:

For Apple: <http://apps.apple.com/us/app/breathe-by-dr-jud/id1472340683>

For Android: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.claritasmindsciences.Breathe&hl=en_US

4-7-8 Breathing: <https://getbreathe.com/>

breathe*calm down*meditate: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.achimsapps.breathe&hl=en_US

Local Resources for Support



Resilience in Stressful Events

601-815-RISE (7473)

Peer support available 24/7

Employee Assistance Program - LifeSynch

To schedule an appointment with a provider, call 866-219-1232

www.lifesynch.com/eap (username: ummc, password: ummc)

24 Hour Crisis Hotlines

Suicide and Emotional Support Crisis Hotline

601-713-HELP (4357)

www.contactthecrisisline.org

National Suicide Hotline

800-273-TALK (8255)

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Sources

CDC: Manage Stress and Anxiety: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

Healthline: 30 Grounding Techniques to quiet distressing thoughts <https://www.healthline.com/health/grounding-techniques>

Dr. Sarah Allen: 7 Simple Grounding Techniques for Calming Down Quickly <https://drsarahallen.com/7-ways-to-calm/>