

## **Managing social distancing, stress and fear**

Stress not only limits our ability to think, evaluate and plan, but it tends to lower our immune responses. Social distancing increases stress in a number of ways. If we self-quarantine, it is important to manage our stress response to increase our ability to think clearly about issues as well as maintain the best health we can. Several “self-help” skills can help:

1. Maintain a positive attitude. Become aware of the tendency to catastrophize. Catastrophizing is the tendency to see a difficult situation as permanent, pervasive and personal. If you catch yourself thinking things like, “This is never going to end, it is ruining everything and I am to blame for it,” challenge yourself. A positive attitude is one that says, “this thing is temporary, it will end; It is affecting my life in many ways, but it is not ruining everything. I am still blessed by\_\_\_\_\_. And I may have faults but I do not have the power to cause this.”
2. Use your imagination in a positive way. The unknown tends to stimulate our imagination. Usually in some catastrophic ways. Become aware of the tendency to anticipate the worst and refocus your attention, gently on positive memories or imagine positive places and experiences. Spend a little time developing the mental exercise of seeing, hearing, and feeling peaceful, safe, carefree, and relaxed experiences and using them as part of your daily routine.
3. If you find stress building up, “walk it off.” Light exercise is helpful in dissipating the build-up of tension during a challenging time. Practice simple bending, stretching and moving exercises. Walk around the yard or house, if you can. Tense and relax different muscle groups.
4. Maintain a routine, even if you are self-quarantined. A characteristic of crisis is a sense that it is all out of control. A routine helps us focus on the things we can control, rather than the things that are out of our control. Lay out a daily schedule of self-care that includes bathing, grooming, making the bed, eating regularly, exercise to the degree you are able, calling friends and/or family, reading, watching videos you enjoy, listening to books on tape, writing in a gratitude log or any other activities that are important to you. Keeping to a well-practiced routine helps us feel that we can control and count on something in our lives. It reduces stress.
5. Stay in contact with friends and family. We are designed for relationship. Being isolated is not easy. Develop a communication plan with friends and family including how and when to get in touch. Be sure they are people you trust to be compassionate and understanding and be compassionate and understanding right back.

For more stress management suggestions see:

<https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4894.pdf>

<https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/pandemics>

<https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4894.pdfhttps://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/apa-blogs/apa-blog/2020/03/rumination-a-cycle-of-negative-thinking>

## **Limit Time Spent Watching the 24 Hour a Day News Outlets**

Neurologically, the more you hear or see a message, the more fixed the pathways in the brain associated with the message become. It begins to feel true, even when it is not. The 24 hour a day news feeds have to fill a lot of time. They do not always fill it with accurate information, but they frequently fill it with interpretation, speculation and drama. They do it repetitively, so, the message begins to feel like fact. It is important to manage our exposure to messages that are opinion rather than fact.

If you find yourself getting more tense/anxious watching the news, turn it off.

Evaluate the credibility of the source. Is it news, opinion or drama? Listen to the adjectives used by the messenger. News should have few emotionally-laden terms.