

## 5 Things You Can Do Right Now to Reduce COVID-19 Stress

**1. Understand what's happening.** In a typical work day, your stress response (fight/flight/freeze) might get triggered by a difficult customer, barking dogs in the kennels, or just *thinking* about your to-do list.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, your stress response may be in overdrive. That's because any real or *perceived* threats to your life and wellbeing quickly triggers your fight/flight/freeze response (sympathetic nervous system) which is controlled by the emotional and primitive parts of your brain.

Guess what feels like a threat to almost all humans? Uncertainty.

What do we have a lot of right now? Uncertainty.

Most of us, at a primitive level, do not feel safe at the moment. Feeling unsafe automatically shifts us into fight, flight, or freeze as an instinctual response for survival. While this stress response can be helpful in short spurts, you don't want it engaged 24/7. Being stuck in survival mode takes a toll on your emotions, health, and relationships.

**2. Pump the breaks to self-regulate.** You can reduce your stress by finding a sense of control over the situation or *how you cope* with the situation. Coping with stress through simple self-regulation practices can help you shift out of survival mode by activating your rest and digest response (parasympathetic nervous system) and re-engaging the more evolved, rational parts of your brain.

These easy practices can help you to feel steadier, calmer, less reactive, and more in control. Here are some ways to pump the breaks on your overactive stress response:

- Focused breathing, such as box breathing
- Ground yourself in the present moment through your senses. Orient yourself to the environment (what can you see, hear, smell, feel, and taste right now?)
- Shake the stress out of your body (just like a dog!)
- Exercise
- Drink more water
- Laugh!

- Dance, sing, or hum
- Talk with a caring friend
- Cuddle your pets
- Hug a loved one (for at least 20 seconds)
- Place your hands on your chest, over your heart
- Do something small within your control: clean a drawer, weed your garden, or brush your cat.

These things make look too simple to make an impact, but they do help the body to relax. Don't knock it until you try it!

**3. Prep your body and mind for sleep.** Sleep is an important part of staying healthy. But when you're in survival mode you might feel too wired to sleep, even when you're tired. Most of us will need to actively prepare our bodies for bed. In addition to pumping the breaks on your stress response all day with the practices listed above, create a 5-20 minute pre-bedtime routine to help shift your body into a more parasympathetic state:

- Do "legs up the wall" pose for 5-10 minutes
- Use a weighted blanket or an 8 pound bag of rice on your belly
- Take a lukewarm shower 60-90 minutes before bed
- Stretch your tight muscles with a foam roller
- Listen to guided meditations
- Soak your feet in Epsom salt
- Write in a journal

**4. Don't take anything personally.** Everyone is in survival mode right now! When our primitive brain is the boss of us, which is the case when we're in fight/flight/freeze, we struggle to communicate, problem solve, and to manage our emotions. Few of us are operating at our best right now.

Try to remember that nothing anyone does right now is about you. It's about how they're feeling. And most people are feeling stressed and scared. Decide not take what other people say and do personally. It's liberating!

**5. Choose a new thought.** When you're feeling stressed remind yourself that it's normal to feel that way right now. There's nothing wrong with you! When you're feeling like this situation is permanent, remind yourself that this is temporary. When you're feeling like you can't handle this challenge, remind yourself that you are a capable, compassionate badass who tackles challenges for living!

Or try repeating one of these mantras to yourself as you do something difficult:

- "I can handle this."
- "I will deal with what happens *when* it happens."
- "I am safe."
- "I'm doing the best I can with the limited resources available."

**6. Stay connected while you sanitize.** Metta Meditation, otherwise known as Loving Kindness Meditation, is a powerful practice (backed up by science) that generates positive emotions, a sense of goodwill, compassion for yourself and others, and fosters connection. Try repeating the following set of phrases 3 times while you wash your hands:

May all beings be safe.

May all beings be happy.

May all beings be healthy.

May all beings live with ease.

Remember: Stress is cumulative, but so is stress management. Small moments of self-regulation (a minute here and there), done many times throughout the day, will make a difference in how you feel and behave. Don't wait until you get home from work or you have a day off to care for yourself. Pump the breaks all day long on your overactive stress response!

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