

Emotionally Surviving COVID-19:

An informational and self help guide provided by your Lighthouse Telehealth EAP team.

MAY 2020
ISSUE 2

Hello and happy Spring to all of you! I hope everyone is staying healthy and starting to adjust to their new normal. For May's newsletter we wanted to focus a bit on Mindfulness, which is about staying present and engaged in whatever you are doing at this very moment. It is often hard to do, especially in stressful times like this. Our minds want to distract us by dwelling on the past or by anxiously anticipating future events, which takes us away from experiencing the joy of today and from being fully present for our loved ones. Meditation is the probably the best way to strengthen our ability to stay focused and mindful but there are other ways as well. Minimizing distractions is a good place to start. For example, if you are playing a game with your child, put your phone in another room so you can give him/her your undivided attention even if this is only for a short period of time. Twenty minutes of your undivided attention will be more meaningful to you and your child than an hour of a distracted you. If you are working on an important work project, work in a calm setting, silence your email notifications, and leave your phone in another room. The project will get done quicker, you are likely to make less mistakes, and ideally the project will not seem so laborious. Often people think they are multi-tasking, when they are actually just dividing their attention between tasks. Divided attention leads to more time spent transitioning between tasks, which in the end is not a time saver. Start to take notice of the things that are stealing your attention away from being present in the moment-identifying a problem is the first step to solving it!

MANAGING ANXIETY WHILE IN QUARANTINE

The isolation you experience from quarantine and mandatory stay-at-home orders can be a major source of anxiety. A global pandemic is a stressful event for everyone and may leave you feeling unbalanced. Even if you do not normally feel anxious, you may be experiencing anxiety due to the current situation and that's OK. It is completely normal to be worried right now. Below are some tips to help you manage your anxiety about COVID-19.

Try to reframe the way you are thinking about staying home.

Positive thinking can be an excellent coping tool. Try to find the positives in your situation. Look at this as an opportunity to spend more



time with your family, or to work on those projects you have always wanted to do around the house.

Be kind to yourself and others.

Everyone reacts differently. There is no “right way” to feel about what is happening. Allow yourself to feel what you feel and find healthy ways to manage negative feelings. You are not alone in feeling more anxiety than normal.



Keep this in mind when interacting with friends and family, including those who are quarantined with you and those you are contacting virtually. Perhaps, be quicker to forgive if tensions run high.

Avoid overexposure to the news, as well as the comment section.

The 24-hour cycle of bad news related to COVID-19 can be overwhelming and make it harder to stay positive. Added to that is constant information on social media as friends and family share their own updates. Choose a trusted news source to get updates from a couple of times a day. Make sure the news you get is reliable and that you have the information you need, without having to hear the same story repeated or embellished on. Muting certain keywords on social media can make keeping up with friends and family more enjoyable.

Focus on the things that you can do.

Possibly one of the most stressful things about this pandemic is that we are being asked to stay home and do nothing. For those who are used to be constantly on the go, this can be frustrating and a source of great anxiety. Without something they can do, many are left feeling helpless. Try to remember there are things that you can do. Staying home as much as possible is the greatest action we can take to protect ourselves against the virus. You can make sure you and your family are washing your hands frequently and thoroughly, at least 20 seconds each time.

Helping others can make you feel better.

If you have the means, you can donate money to relief funds and food banks. One of the

easiest things you can do is to express your gratitude to essential workers. Be kind to grocery store workers when you do go out. They are busier than ever at this time, and nice words and a simple thank you can go a long way. If you have kids, a fun project could be creating signs for the front yard saying thank you to any health care workers, mail workers, or sanitation workers that might drive by your yard.

Routines can be comforting.

Develop a new routine for yourself. The closer you keep this routine to your usual daily routine, the more you create a sense of normalcy. If you keep your regular hours, going to sleep and getting up at your normal times, it will be much easier to transition back to working in the office when quarantine ends.

Make sure that you are taking care of yourself.

Don't let personal hygiene and your health fall to the wayside during this time. Don't forget to eat or hydrate.



Regular healthy meals and plenty of water can go a long way to making you feel better. Take a shower each day. It will make you feel better to be clean. Find ways to workout at home; virtual classes are a great way to do this. Finally, make sure you are getting plenty of sleep. Rest is important for your immune system and overall wellbeing.

Now is a good time to take up meditation.

Get comfortable, take a deep breath, and relax. Your focus should be on your breathing. Meditation offers many techniques for calming yourself and can be a healthy tool to deal with anxiety and help you find balance in your life. If you are unfamiliar with meditation, there are several apps you can download to talk you through a simple meditation.

Communicate your feelings with others.

Your friends and family can likely relate to the anxiety you may be feeling. Talk with them

about your feelings when you are ready. You don't have to talk before you are ready. It can be nice to catch up with friends and talk about other topics. Video conferencing apps make it easy for you to see and talk to your friends. You can have a virtual party or play games together.

Reach out for help when you need it.

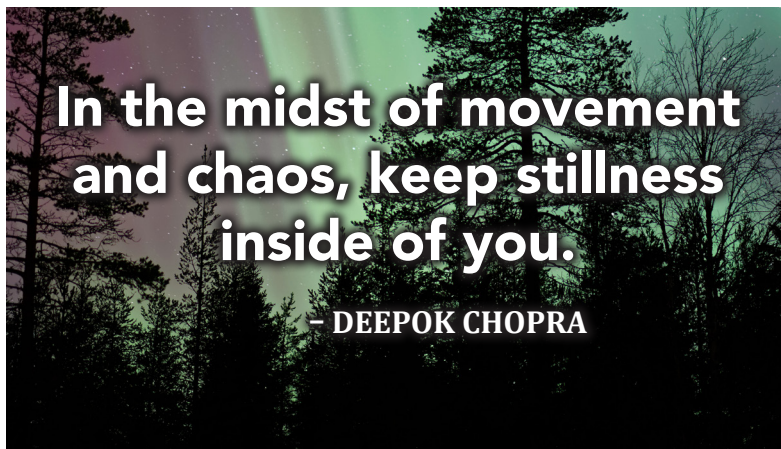
Remember you have access to an EAP program that offers telehealth services, meaning you can speak to someone via telephone or video from the comfort of your own home. To make an appointment simply call 419-475-5338. We are here for you!

Resources:

Gupta, A. (2020, March). COVID-19 lockdown guide: How to manage anxiety and isolation during quarantine [Blog post]. Retrieved April 1, 2020.

Smith, M. & Robinson, L. (2020, March). Coronavirus anxiety: Coping with stress, fear, and uncertainty. Retrieved April 1, 2020. U.S. National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD), Division of Viral Diseases. (2020, March 30). Stress and coping. Retrieved April 1, 2020.

There are numerous free apps and YouTube videos that will guide you through basic meditation and deep breathing exercises. Most people are familiar with Deepok Chopra and his work on finding inner peace through activities such as meditation. You can find a free 21 day meditation experience on his website: <https://chopra.com/>



Inspirational Quotes

“
Be happy for no reason, like a child. If you are happy for a reason, you are in trouble, because that reason can be taken from you.

- DEEPOK CHOPRA ”

“
You must find the place inside yourself where nothing is impossible.

- DEEPOK CHOPRA ”

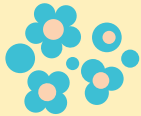
“Every time you are tempted to react in the same old way, ask if you want to be a prisoner of the past or a pioneer of the future.”

- DEEPOK CHOPRA

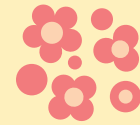


We can cultivate a positive mindset through optimism, mindfulness, and gratitude. Here are several exercises that will help you work on all 3 of these areas.

Optimistic people are more likely to live longer, according to a new US study. Those with a positive mindset were found, on average, to have an 11-15 per cent longer lifespan than pessimists, with more chance of living until the age of 85. (<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/08/190826150700.htm>)



*Go 24 hours without complaining.
(Not even once.)
Then watch how your life starts changing!*



Calming the anxious mind through Mindfulness activities.

Despite our best efforts our mind sometimes takes over with worry and fear. It is impossible to know what the future holds, yet these anxious thoughts sometimes occupy a large portion of our time thinking about the underlying "what ifs." Worry is not necessarily bad if it leads to a course of action but a lot of the time it just leaves us feeling drained and takes up valuable time that could be spent on the here and now. Sometimes this worry is so intense it tricks the brain into thinking you are in real physical danger, causing the body to respond with panic symptoms like shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat, shaking, sweating, dizziness, chest pain, and even fear of dying. Here are some activities you can practice when you are feeling anxious, distracted, or even when you are starting to experience some of these panic symptoms. These activities will help you reconnect with the present and help return you to state of calm. Note: these techniques will not be very useful in the midst of an actual panic attack unless you have practiced them previously in a calm state so pick an activity and practice 1-2 times a day for better results.

Square Breathing

1. Breathe in through your nose (your belly should be expanding) slowly to a count of 4 seconds
2. Hold the air in your lungs for a count of 4 seconds
3. Breathe out through your mouth slowly (as your belly constricts) to a count of 4 seconds
4. Hold your breath for a count of four seconds
5. Repeat this sequence for a couple of minutes while keeping your mind focused on the sounds of your breath or the physical sensation of your abdomen moving in and out. As other distracting thoughts enter your mind, just allow them to pass and refocus your attention on your breath.

5-4-3-2-1 Technique (a simple way to gain control over your anxious mind)

What are 5 things you can see?

Look around and acknowledge 5 things you see. Maybe it's a bird flying by, a pencil on your desk, a plant in the corner, the symbols on your

car console. Pay attention to the small details you never noticed.

What are 4 things you can feel?

Notice the sensation of your shirt against your chest, the sun on your skin, or the sensation of your feet touching the floor. Pick up an object like a rock or leaf and feel its texture against your hand (is it rough or smooth, does it feel cool to the touch, etc.).

What are 3 things you can hear?

Distant traffic, kids playing in the distance, a ticking clock on the wall, the wind picking up, etc.

What are 2 things you can smell?

Try to notice smells in the air around you, like fresh moved grass, an unlit candle, or even your own skin.

What is 1 thing you can taste?

Maybe the taste of lingering morning coffee or your morning toothpaste. If you have a piece of gum, candy, or a snack on hand, pop it in your mouth and focus your attention on the flavors.

Body Awareness (Therapistaid.com)

The body awareness technique will bring you into the here-and-now by directing your focus to sensations in the body. Pay special attention to the physical sensations created by each step.

1. Take 5 long, deep breaths through your nose, and exhale through puckered lips.
2. Place both feet flat on the floor. Wiggle your toes. Curl and uncurl your toes several times. Spend a moment noticing the sensations in your feet.
3. Stomp your feet on the ground several times. Pay attention to the sensations in your feet and legs as you make contact with the ground.

4. Clench your hands into fists, then release the tension. Repeat this 10 times.

5. Press your palms together. Press them harder and hold this pose for 15 seconds. Pay attention to the feeling of tension in your hands and arms.

6. Rub your palms together briskly. Notice and sound and the feeling of warmth.

7. Reach your hands over your head like you're trying to reach the sky. Stretch like this for 5 seconds. Bring your arms down and let them relax at your sides.

8. Take 5 more deep breaths and notice the feeling of calm in your body.

Focusing on **Gratitude** is a way to help you find more fulfillment and joy in the life you have right now. It is about appreciating what you have versus focusing on what you don't have. If we keep waiting for an event in the future to bring us happiness (i.e. promotion, finding that soul mate, retirement) we will miss out on truly experiencing all that we have today. So, pick your gratitude homework assignment:

1. **Each day write down 5 things in your life that you are thankful for.**

These might be things we take for granted like our health, job, or ability to provide for our families or they might be things that brought us pleasure during our day like a good cup of coffee, a walk in the park, or planting flowers. The possibilities are endless to feel free to challenge yourself with a greater number than 5.

2. **Have a family meal.**

While sitting down with your family for a meal, take turns going around the table and sharing something that was awesome about today.

3. **Create a list of 100 things you are grateful for.**

Depending on where your mindset is you may be able to easily blow through this assignment in one sitting or it may take a few weeks...or months (but don't stop until you get there). On days your thoughts are bringing you down, take a moment to reflect on this list.

Your EAP team is here for you any time you need us. There is no issue too big or too small to talk to a professional about. All information is kept private and confidential including from your employer. Please contact [419-475-5338](tel:419-475-5338) to schedule an appointment.

Remember to ask us about the myStrength app, which is a behavioral health app that can assist you in meeting your health and wellness goals.