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Virus can absolutely affect mental health

By JASON KAPLAN

If you need help coping, there are professionals available

As much of America is quarantined, either because folks are working from home or temporarily unemployed, catching the COVID-19 virus, if venturing out, shouldn't be their only concern.

Maintaining good mental health is also important.

AnnMarie Colandrea, a licensed clinical social worker and psychotherapist with over 20 years of experience in the human services field, said the change in people's schedule, being unable to leave home, and a lack of interaction with other humans could increase the chances of developing depression. Increased feelings of anxiety is also a concern with overexposure to the bad news which is reported on a daily basis.

"Researchers and scientists are speaking of the likelihood of the Coronavirus inflicting emotional trauma and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on an unprecedented global scale, because, along with other factors, the coronavirus has no boundaries to any specific geographical area," Colandrea, who has an office in Cornwall, said. "The fear and feelings of physical vulnerability, including the possibility of death, for individuals and their loved ones, along with the forced isolation, massive job losses and economic hardship create a forecast



AnnMarie Colandrea

of debilitating psychological disorders for potentially millions of people around the world."

In order to maintain a positive attitude and reduce anxiety, Colandrea offers a number of tips.

Maintaining good hygiene is especially important. She said get out of bed at a regular time each day, if possible. Take a shower and get dressed, even if there's nowhere to go.

"Keeping ourselves clean and looking nice helps us feel nicer on the inside," said Colandrea. Find opportunities to do things that normally wouldn't get done. Fix things around the house, paint, or complete any other forgotten projects. Colandrea also suggests taking up a new hobby or picking up an old one.

Sitting on the couch and watching television is okay in moderation, but too much isn't healthy.

Participating in some kind of daily physical activity is important. Colandrea suggests going outside at least once a day, so long as there's not a lot of people. A 10-minute walk can boost one's mood for the rest of the day, helping the brain produce beneficial chemicals like dopamine and serotonin. Those who have exercise machines, weights, or other equipment at home are

encouraged to use them. There are also a number of free resources, which can be accessed from home, offering exercise, meditation, and yoga classes.

These are "things you can do in the comfort of your home without having to worry about what other people think," said Colandrea.

Contact with others can be maintained through regular phone calls or video chats, as well as writing an e-mail or sending a letter through the mail.

When the quarantine was first instituted, Colandrea said she observed a decrease in the number of scheduled therapy sessions. She said she made the decision to not meet with patients face-to-face and instead offer sessions through the internet. Initially, it was

tough for people to get out of their comfort zone and keep sessions which were already scheduled. Some didn't have the same privacy at home that they would experience in Colandrea's office.

Over the past couple of weeks, Colandrea is finding her schedule is getting heavier. Some clients are maintaining their regular appointments while some patients are returning after not being seen for a long time. Even new patients, who were interested in therapy sessions but didn't have the time, are scheduling appointments.

Although folks can take some comfort knowing they're not alone in dealing with the effects of the pandemic, not practicing good mental health can lead them down a gloomy road.

Being anxious is a normal

reaction to stress. Colandrea said one should seek professional help if they start noticing an increased use in alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs, or is experiencing feelings of hopelessness and sadness, uncontrollable worry, has difficulty sleeping, or their appetite has changed.

"The best way to manage the everlasting effects is to seek professional help, sooner rather than later," Colandrea said. "What we do know about PTSD and other mental health disorders is that most people will be able to recover and regain typical functioning through the help of therapy, and in some cases medication. People can help themselves by reaching out to others to provide check-ins, or if possible picking up items when going out for essentials."