

# TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

## March 2020 Newsletter

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly raised anxiety and stress levels across the world. Many of us have not encountered uncertainty and difficulty at such a large scale in our lives before. On top of that, we are also currently experiencing a drastic change in our daily lives as we are asked to stay at home and practice physical distancing to reduce the spread of the virus. When dealing with change and uncertainty at this level, it is normal to feel overwhelmed and scared, however, there are concrete steps that all of us can take to better cope with the current reality. Here are some coping tips that you may find helpful.

### 1. BE INFORMED BUT AVOID OVER-CONSUMPTION OF NEWS

Are you finding yourself constantly glued to your television/computer/phone screens, reading and hearing the latest news updates on the virus? While it can feel tempting and even be a form of short-term coping mechanism to watch and read the news non-stop, unfortunately that will do little to help ease your nerves. It is important to stay informed and follow government guidelines on how to stay safe during the pandemic, but constant exposure to media-coverage on the pandemic will ultimately stress you out. According to *Anxiety Canada*, “as we think about and focus more on coronavirus, the perception of threat increases (not the actual risk but our perception of it)”, in other words, we believe that we are much more in danger than we may be in reality.

Try to limit getting your daily news updates to just a couple times a day and rely on reputable, fact-based sources of information rather than social media. The Government of Canada’s website or your provincial government’s website are often the best places to start (e.g. [www.canada.ca](http://www.canada.ca) and [www.gov.bc.ca](http://www.gov.bc.ca)).

### 2. PRACTICE HEALTHY HABITS AND GOOD HYGIENE

Knowing how to keep ourselves safe during the pandemic can do wonders to reduce our stress levels. Follow the government’s guidelines on how to keep yourself healthy and safe during the pandemic. Some of the important recommendations include, washing hands properly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, avoiding touching your face, maintaining a distance of 2 meters from others, staying at home as much as possible etc. More detailed prevention tips and guidelines can be found on the BC Centre of Disease Control’s website ([www.bccdc.ca](http://www.bccdc.ca)).

Moreover, it is equally crucial to maintain healthy habits, such as eating a wholesome, healthy diet, getting enough sleep, and finding time for daily exercise in order to keep our immune systems healthy and strong.

### 3. MAINTAIN ROUTINE AND STRUCTURE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE

As we are asked to stay at home and practice social distancing during this time, our lives suddenly look drastically different than they used to. Many of us are now working remotely from home, only leaving the house for essential work and errands such as picking up groceries or walking the dog. While it can be difficult to carve out a routine in this time, having a set schedule for things and some structure to your day can help provide some sense of normalcy in your life. In a *Times Colonist* article, Canadian astronauts shared the importance of creating a routine when faced with long periods of isolation away from their families and friends. If you are working from home, try to follow your usual work schedule as much as

possible. This means taking breaks during your usual times and checking in with a colleague (virtually) from time to time.

Retired Canadian astronaut, Chris Hadfield, also recommends creating an objective or goal on what you can accomplish during your period of self-isolation. This can involve learning something new, finding a new hobby, or finally taking the time to tackle an old passion project. Forming and pursuing goals can help establish a sense of purpose and direction in your life during a period of uncertainty.

#### **4. TAKE CARE OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH**

First and foremost, realize that it is completely normal to feel more anxious and worried as we all tackle this difficulty together. Take some time to practice acceptance of how you are feeling, realizing that you are doing the best that you can under the circumstances and that there are concrete steps that you can take to better cope with the current crisis and keep yourself safe.

During this time of heightened anxiety and uncertainty, our mental health requires extra care and attention. Take regular time-outs to practice self-care, focusing on doing things that bring you joy and calmness. This may mean practicing mindfulness, doing yoga or some other exercise that you enjoy, doing deep breathing exercises, and taking time to talk to your loved ones at home or virtually. There are also various different resources that you can access for help should you feel that you need professional assistance. Some important resources to keep in mind are your EFAP, websites such as *Anxiety Canada* or the Bounce Back program, or your local Crisis Centre (e.g. [www.crisiscentre.bc.ca](http://www.crisiscentre.bc.ca)).

#### **5. SPEND QUALITY TIME WITH EACH OTHER (AT HOME OR VIRTUALLY) TO COMBAT LONELINESS**

While we practice social distancing at this time, it is normal to experience loneliness and low spirits from time to time. However, thanks to modern-day technology, most of us can stay connected to others in a variety of ways that do not require meeting in-person. If you have family members living with you at this time, find ways to spend quality time together such as going out for a walk (if you are well and while maintaining physical distance from others) or playing games and watching television together at home. Talk to friends and loved ones by phone or video at least once daily, perhaps having lunch or dinner together virtually. While the manner in which we connect may be different and perhaps not ideal, remaining connected with our loved ones can help alleviate loneliness while knowing that we are taking the necessary steps to keep ourselves and each other safe.

#### **6. HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH THE PANDEMIC**

As with adults, children will likely experience stress and fear due to the unpredictable, changed circumstances, however, they will require the support of their parents and/or the adults around them to cope with the situation.

The Government of British Columbia's website advises keeping a sense of calm when talking to children and providing age-appropriate, factual information to them, only as much as necessary. It is also important to do regular check-ins with them on how they are doing, reassuring them as necessary, and providing ample opportunity for them to share their thoughts and feelings with you. Parents and guardians should also help children follow the tips above such as practicing healthy habits and hygiene, finding ways to socialize with friends virtually, sticking to a routine, and finding ways to spend quality, family time together.

**For confidential assistance**  
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