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What to Do In These Stressful Times

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<http://www.dea.org/>



The current pandemic is stressful. And like all stress, it sets off a cascade of reactions in our body/mind. Like releasing cortisol which gets us ready to flee or fight. And while heightening our awareness, focusing our attention, having a burst of adrenalized energy may be ok in the short term it takes a toll in the long term. A person of any age with a heart condition or diabetes or respiratory problem is going to be harder hit. Another hormone besides cortisol that gets released, especially in women, in times of stress is oxytocin—sometimes called the ‘tend and befriend’ hormone.

Stress disrupts sleep and often leads to a higher intake of high fat-high sugar comfort foods. And decreased sleep has a negative impact on our immune system

For people living alone, especially those who may rely more on others to meet the basic needs of daily living—like getting groceries or having meals on wheels delivered - the impact of the pandemic on healthy eating may be even greater.

People staying home and living alone tend to be less physically active, which further has a negative impact, especially on older people who tend to lose muscle mass and tone with aging making them more susceptible to falls.

What can you do in these times to minimize stress and uncertainty?

1. Call people in your life who matter to you. If they're older, ask their advice: "Have you ever seen anything like this before?" "Is this what WWII was like?" If they're younger, reassure them: "we'll get through this"

How often should you call? Daily. Just a hello or a check-in restores connection. Talk about something other than the pandemic.

2. Go outside. Look outside. Look at online nature shows. Your "brain on nature" functions better
3. Limit your daily intake of news. Especially TV news. Check in with the news twice a day, and never right before bed.
4. Find a way to be more physically active. Go for a walk. Do some advance problem-solving to figure out how/where to go for a walk that will allow you to practice social distancing. Find an on-line exercise /yoga class.
5. Identify one good source of accurate on-line information and stick with it. I recommend the Center for Disease Control (CDC) or the World Health Organization (WHO). Avoid searching the internet for more info. The CDC has all you need.
6. Participate in virtual coffee hours. Organizations and individuals are setting these up as scheduled or drop-in Zoom calls.
7. Stay active in the community from home. Whatever you liked to do, do it from home. Google Arts and Culture has lined up great virtual museum tours.
8. Remain creative. Tell your story. Stories are how we make meaning. How are you dealing with this? Share your tips with others on Facebook or other social media
9. Find ways to laugh. Laughter improves oxygen intake, stimulates circulation, relaxes muscles.
10. Remember we're #InItTogether and oh yes, #WashYourHands (while whistling your favorite tune).

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